JUST THE TICKET!

MY 50 YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SHOW BUSINESS

Percy Tucker
For Graham Brian Dickason.

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PREFACE

Attending an opening night performance in Cape Town without meeting Percy Tucker and Graham Dickason is unimaginable and rarely is there a ballet or opera event to which they do not bring their elegance and charm. Despite his many decades in theatre, Percy’s regular attendance, unwavering support, enthusiasm and sheer delight in the industry that runs through his veins is remarkable. A chance conversation at one such opening performance at The Fugard Theatre led to the publication of this e-book version of *Just The Ticket!* An autobiography detailing Percy’s involvement and support of the entertainment industry, the book also serves as an archival document, recording the complexities of a theatre industry during the apartheid years.

The original proofs were destroyed in a fire at the publishers which meant that despite many requests a reprint of the first edition was nigh impossible. As a theatre scholar and critic, Percy’s book has been an invaluable resource to me and it seemed a fitting contribution to the South African archive to enable its reprint and accessibility in the digital age.

It gives me great joy to celebrate the occasion of Percy’s 90th birthday with the release of this edition. While he may have “retired” from Computicket in 1994 his involvement in and support of the performing arts in South Africa has never wavered and a second volume of his autobiography would not be a slim one.

I hope you enjoy reading the remarkable story of the “boy from Benoni” who put the East Rand town on the map long before Charlize Theron became a household name.
Tracey Saunders
Cape Town
10\textsuperscript{th} July 2018
FOREWORD

I am delighted, on behalf of our profession, to have the opportunity of expressing from the heart a few thoughts about a very special man. It is over thirty years since I, then a bumptious teenager, first met Percy Tucker. I arrived in Johannesburg just having signed pianist Russ Conway to tour South Africa and was taken to lunch by Percy. It was the beginning of a wonderful friendship. The book you are about to read chronicles the four decades, and more, of his life spent in our strange and exciting world. Percy has earned a very special place in the history of South African theatre and entertainment. He was the first true gentleman I met in the business and was always in a class of his own - a friend of the theatre - and the theatre is deeply indebted to him.

Percy, bitten by the theatre bug at a very early age, has dedicated his life to the performing arts. By creating first Show Service and then the gigantic Computicket network, he has had an enormous influence over the development of the full spectrum of entertainment in our country. Without an audience a performance is meaningless, and he enabled people to see anything they wanted to with ease. The importance of this contribution can never be exaggerated.

A book about the theatre is born long before the actual writing begins- in Percy's case it was when he was a young stage-struck theatregoer from Benoni and went on to become a fledgling ticket agent with one booking office in Jeppe Street, Johannesburg. He persevered where, so many others had failed until he controlled the ticketing of every theatrical, entertainment and sporting event staged in our country.

Percy Tucker is an extraordinary man who personifies
everything a ticket agent ought ideally to be. His vision of the theatrical world is always clear-sighted, true and steady. He is unbelievably generous, always scrupulously fair and understanding, treating everybody - stars and beginners - in exactly the same sensitive way, and he is entirely devoid of malice - unusual traits in our profession. A wonderful showman, he has inspired people to think that the theatre is not only important but indispensable to our lives. Self-effacing ('And what do you do, Mr Tucker? 'Oh, I just sell the tickets'), always optimistic and supportive, generous with advice and encouragement, he has been a true patron of the arts.

How well I remember his kind remarks about some of my early abortive efforts, and his praise, so gratefully received, for later and better efforts remains etched in my memory. He has had a great influence on a great many careers and we have all benefited from his wise counsel. For many reasons, connected with finance, the changing structure of the theatre, and the times we now live in, we will not see his like again and more's the pity. His departure from Computicket marked the end of an era and left a huge gap. Things will never be the same again, but his legacy remains.

No one I know goes to the theatre more often than Percy Tucker, and indeed, the entertainment world has always seemed to nourish and elate him, and he has spent his life organising the chaos endemic to the theatre business. He has enormous integrity, an accolade given to many but deserved by few. His prodigious memory for productions and people is a source of wonder to me, and he himself soon became one of South Africa’s best loved theatre personalities.

Always in the wings, alert to every need and every crisis,
Percy Tucker has played a vital role in keeping entertainment alive, coping with the changes that both the years and our political developments have brought, and feeding the arts with his love and admiration. Today, with the decline both of funds and respect, the arts are more vulnerable than ever before and people like Percy Tucker are needed more than ever. He has served our industry with fanatical loyalty and is the nearest thing we have to a guru. Friends like Percy Tucker come only once in a lifetime. Read and enjoy this indispensable account of his - and our - world across five decades.

PIETER TOERIEN
Cape Town
1997
There is an ancient belief that as long as you have good memories, old age will bring the pleasant experience of reliving them. Happily, I am quite a way from old age yet, but when it can no longer be kept at bay, I won't be short of memories—magic memories. In many ways I've lived a life of reflected glory, basking in the light of the many dozens of great performing artists I have met and worked with and, in several cases, with whom I've made lasting friendships. This enviable state of affairs came about through a love affair with the theatre, in all its forms, which began in my childhood and has continued undimmed ever since. Eventually this great passion led me to earn my living by the pleasurable means of devoting myself to my hobby.

From the moment I opened Show Service in 1954 and became what my horrified father called 'a ticket seller', work and pleasure became indivisible. I actually enjoyed slaving away, virtually round the clock, for some forty years before reluctantly having to concede, in 1994, that I'd reached the age of retirement. The work was hard and not, of course, without difficulties, dramas and disappointments, but these were far outweighed by the constant challenge and excitement of keeping the arts alive in our complex, constantly changing, often troubled, but always vibrant culture. Nobody, in my view, lives a totally charmed life, but I've come pretty close, blessed as I've been by good fortune.

None of this, however, makes a good reason to tell my story, and when it was suggested that I write my autobiography, my first reaction was to think, ‘Who on earth would be interested in
the life of a stage-struck small-town boy, who followed a dream and found a niche in the confines of a relatively small entertainment industry?’

Forced, however, to give the matter some thought, I realised that my story is the story of six decades of entertainment in South Africa in general, and Johannesburg in particular. Looking back, it is astounding how many gifted artists of international repute have visited these shores, through good times and bad, during my own lifetime, bringing pleasure and enrichment to hundreds of thousands of South Africans, many of whom might never otherwise have had the opportunity to see and hear them perform.

Then, too, I've watched homegrown talent develop and prosper, finding fame both here and overseas, and seen the number of theatre buildings grow to house the ambitions of our own producers, directors and actors. I've marvelled at the courage of those who fought the iniquitous colour bar, using the universal language of drama as a weapon, and been awestruck by the powerful and uninhibited gifts of black performers, struggling to make their voices heard in a land which denied them access to its privilege.

Delving into the archives, I realised that my own life encompasses a remarkable pageant of people, places and events which deserve a mention in our recorded history. I realised, too, that despite the handful of memoirs and histories of individual lives and institutions, no book has been published that gives an overview of the last sixty years of entertainment in this country.

And, on a more frivolous and egocentric note, why not share some of my more amusing and glamorous memories as a pleasant reminder of things past for the older generation and,
hopefully, a fascinating journey into their parents' and grandparents' world for the young?

And so, I invite you to journey back and forth with me over the years…..

This book would never have seen the light of day without the unstinting help of a great many people. It is, alas, impossible for me to mention everyone by name but there are several debts of gratitude that cannot go unrecorded.

To Patric van Blerk must go the credit for instigating the project by introducing me to Nicholas Combrinck of Jonathan Ball Publishers. It is thanks to Nicholas' persuasion, encouragement and commitment that the book became a reality.

My thanks to Clive Hirschhorn for suggesting that I bring Robyn Karney from London to work with me on the book. Herself a former South African who began her working life in the Johannesburg theatre, and subsequently a writer and editor, Robyn gave up a year of her life to apply her expertise to guiding me through the morass of memories and piles of paper - a task which she originally thought would take a little over six weeks! For once she was wrong. It's impossible to express my appreciation of such dedication.

In correcting and polishing the text, my editor Pat Tucker (no relation) gave her time, her encouragement, her experience and, most importantly, her skill, well beyond the call of duty. We were extremely fortunate to have her services.

Countless other people gave of their time and effort to answering queries, confirming facts and sharing memories. Again, I cannot list all of them, and I beg the understanding of anybody who has grounds to feel excluded. However, in no particular order, I must record the help given by Malcolm
Hacksley, Jeremy Fogg and Ann Torlesse of the National English Literary Museum (NELM) in Grahamstown where my research began. It is an inspirational institution and the unstinting courtesy of the staff will be long remembered. Thanks too, to Linda Boswell, Marius Basson and Carol Leigh of the African Studies Library, Johannesburg, for their endless co-operation, to archivist Edna Beukes at the Civic Theatre, Marie Human of Bailey's African Archives, Louana Brewis of the National Archives in Pretoria, and Clive Chipkin, whose book *Johannesburg Style* was a rich source.

Prominent among those who allowed me to drive them mad in my quest for accurate facts were the ever-helpful Rita Ehlers, Peter Terry and Jaco van der Westhuizen at PACT Drama, Johan Mare and Christine Keitz at PACT Opera, and Jonathan Hurwitz of PACT Ballet. I also tormented Joan Brickhill, Eghard van der Hoven, Michal Grobbelaar, Mannie Manim and Des and Dawn Lindberg, as well as several former colleagues from Computicket, notably Aubrey Louw, Peter Campbell and Iona Myburgh.

Anthony Farmer was a mine of information and memories, as were Hazel and Sam Feldman, Marilyn Lurie and Kay Blythe of Showtime International, and Gail Jaffit-Leibman and her sister Lorraine Conidaris. I owe a very special 'thank you' to the incomparable Percy Baneshik and to my dear friend and mentor Leonard Schach who, sadly, did not live to see the finished product.

The thorny path to completion was also made easier by Henry Ascar, who generously loaned me his archival material, Peter Feldman of *The Star*, Brian Brooke, Michael Brooke, Fiona Fraser, Olive King, Vanessa Cooke, Philip Morrall, Robert Burring of SAMRO, the staff of the Vita Awards office, Bob Courtney, John
JUST THE TICKET!


In Cape Town, Basil Rubin was infinitely helpful, as were CAPAB archivist Hope Malan, Marilyn Holloway of CAPAB Ballet, Rodney Phillips at the Baxter Theatre, Ronnie Quibell, Robert Kirby, Joan Manners and, of course, my friend Pieter Toerien. Special thanks to Joy Wildman for allowing me to read her unpublished memoirs of Taubie Kushlick, and to Emmanuel Zabar who diligently helped me to file my massive collection of memorabilia.

Last, but certainly not least, I must express my gratitude to photographer Ruphin Coudyzer for making his superb work available to me and to Francine Blum of Jonathan Ball Publishers for her help and interest.

Finally, without the loyalty and devotion of my staff at Show Service and Computicket, my dreams and ambitions would never have come to fruition. They know who they are, and I will be forever grateful to them. I mean no disrespect to the others when I single out in particular Sheila Thomas, Joan Manners,
Percy Tucker

Martie Geerdts, Glynnis Davies, Molly Meredith, Rene Hodkinson, Isabel Mendoza, Martie Bettini, Florence Msimango, Alice Nawrattel, Tommy Mahlobogoane, Cynthia Jurrius, Mary Harding, Mavis Oliver, Rose Ryder, Mary Rise borough, Cheryl van Doorn, Graydon Fry, and a special thank you to Maria Faria. Rina Minnaar, Eddie Edwards, Pearl Niemach, Dan Liebenberg and Peggy Henriques who are, alas, no longer with us, deserve to be remembered. This book doesn't pretend to be an exhaustive listing of every theatrical event that ever happened here- that would take several volumes - but I hope that the information will prove useful to future historians, and the content interesting and entertaining to present readers.

On the 26 April 1997, just prior to the publication of this book, Brian Brooke, the last of the great South African actor/director/managers passed away. His memory will live on in these pages.

PERCY TUCKER
Johannesburg
1997
AUTHOR’S NOTE

Aside from my own experience and memories, the major source of information for this book has been my substantial archive of personal and business letters and documents, mementoes, photographs, diaries, theatre, programmes and press clippings collected over my lifetime.

The facts have been supplemented or verified by the records of theatrical managements, cinema and sports personnel, critics and journalists, library news archives and, of course, former colleagues.

In addition, I consulted the following books:

*Beginners Please*, Patricia Storrar, Children’s Theatre, 1968

*Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, Abe Laufe, David & Charles, 1969

*But the Melody Lingers On*, Malcolm Woolfson, Perskor, 1992

*Don’t Put Your Daughter on the Stage*, Margaret Webster, Alfred A Knopf, 1972

*International Theatre Annual No 3*, ed. Harold Hobson, John Calder, 1953

*Johannesburg Style*, Clive Chipkin, David Philip, 1993

*My Own Personal Star*, Brian Brooke, Limelight Press, 1978

*My Story*, Harry M. Miller, MacMillan Australia, 1983

*Stage by Stage*, Donald Inskip, Human & Rousseau, 1977
Percy Tucker

*The Best of Company*, Pat Schwartz, Ad Donker, 1988
*The Boys*, Christopher Fitz-Simon, Nick Hern Books, 1994
*The Long Road*, Malcolm Woolfson, Napac, 1986
*They Built a Theatre*, Arthur and Anna Romain Hoffman, Ad Donker, 1980
PART ONE
THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM
At 11.30 a.m. on 14 August 1994, sporting an uncharacteristically colourful waistcoat made in London for the occasion, I made my way to the Johannesburg Civic Theatre. The new management of Computicket were throwing a farewell party for me, the last of a series of such gatherings at which I had taken leave of my staff and the representatives of theatre managements in Cape Town and Durban. It was difficult to believe that two days later, on 16 August, I would be officially retired - forty years to the day since I had started my career with the opening of Show Service.

I had no idea what form the party would take, other than the provision of a buffet lunch during which I would see friends and colleagues with whom I had spent my working life. I knew that Mike Egan, the CEO of Interleisure, Computicket's parent company, would say a few words, and that I would have to reply, but I was totally unprepared for what actually awaited me.

The foyer of the Civic was hung with boards recording the history of my years in show business, plus hundreds of photographs of me with the often-glittering international stars who had visited here: Marlene Dietrich, Trini Lopez, Victoria de los Angeles, Roger Moore, Margot Fonteyn, Liza Minnelli, Elton John, and dozens of others. Over a podium hung a large banner of farewell greetings from my staff; on
the podium, two grand pianos faced each other; in the centre of it stood a waiting microphone.

The buffet tables were bedecked with flowers, and well-known show tunes played through the speakers as I chatted to Mike Egan, to my Operations Director and rock-like second-in-command for twenty-eight years, Aubrey Louw, and my loyal, stalwart and funny Head of Information, Iona Myburgh, with whom I had fought and laughed for thirty-four years.

Despatched to the doors to greet the guests, I was astonished by the size of the crowd of luminaries who poured in. The first lady of South African musical comedy, Joan Brickhill, blonde and beautiful as ever, arrived with Ian von Memerty and Bryan Schimmel the piano-playing stars of *A Handful of Keys*; producers Des and Dawn Lindberg came, followed by impresario and producer Pieter Toerien and my cousin, the high-profile impresario Hazel Feldman, with her father, my uncle Joe Goldstein; the elegant Public Relations executive Wilma Lawson Turnbull, director and designer Anthony Farmer, former Mayor Sam Moss, and actor-singer Richard Loring. Melanie Millin-Moore, Sol Kerzner’s public relations supremo came, as did actor and executive director of the Market Theatre, John Kani and actor-producer Shirley Firth, actor, director and TV producer Bobby Heaney, actors Michael McGovern and Annabel Linder, as well as PACT Ballet's Dawn Weller and Martin Raistrick, Alan Joseph, then chief executive of the Civic, and my close companion Graham Dickason.
And that was just the start. A good hour later I'd been greeted - and often hugged and kissed- by five hundred people. I was immeasurably moved that the eighty-five-year-old former actor-manager Brian Brooke, as handsome and urbane as ever, and his gracious wife Petrina Fry had made the journey from their farm, and by the appearance of Percy Baneshik, the best-known and most knowledgeable of South Africa's theatre critics.

After lunch, critic and columnist Barry Range, a forceful, witty and articulate Master of Ceremonies, made a wonderful speech and announced that a succession of people would now pay tribute to my achievements. Since I prefer to hide behind the limelight of others, what followed embarrassed me but, I must admit, also filled me with a warm glow of pride.

I am a very emotional man and the honours that were showered on me brought me to the verge of tears that needed all my willpower to control when, some three-and-a-half hours later, I had to acknowledge them. Ian von Memerty and Bryan Schimmel sang songs for me, as did Richard Loring, Des and Dawn Lindberg, and the remarkable Joan Brickhill, whose rendition of what might have been my own signature tune, *There's No Business Like Show Business*, gave the patient crowd the excitement of a first night.

Councillor Cecil Bass, on behalf of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre Foundation, did me the great honour of making me a Patron of the Civic; Market Theatre chairman
Grahame Lindop ended his deft and gracious address by making me the first ever Friend of the Market Theatre with tickets for all the Market shows for the rest of my life; and many further presentations and speeches were made - by former executive director of the Civic Theatre, Michal Grobbelaar and by Sun International's Michael Lovegrove; by actor Patrick Mynhardt and radio personality Paddy O'Byrne; and, of course, by Mike Egan, who conferred on me the status of the first and only Patron of the organisation I had founded. There were tributes on a very personal note, too, such as that from Iona Myburgh who made a presentation on behalf of the Computicket staff, some two hundred and fifty of them.

I reflected that there is, indeed, no business like show business.

Recollecting this momentous occasion in tranquillity, what really surprised me that afternoon was to learn that I was variously and widely perceived as 'Mr Show Biz', 'the father confessor to the profession' and a 'doctor' with the cure for all box-office ailments - this from Michal Grobbelaar, who, in a fulsome flight of fancy, seemed to think that in opening up what he called 'a new sphere of marketing for live theatre', I had single-handedly made the theatre a going concern. And for the young Barry Ronge, sitting in the Chesa Coffee Bar back in the Sixties and watching the comings and goings across the arcade, Show Service had been 'a tiny little window into a large and fabulous world'.
Well, it was a large and fabulous world, and one that I entered with no thought other than to follow my boyhood dream of working within the theatrical profession. Everything I did sprang from my passionate desire to see the theatre flourish and its audiences grow, and I foresaw none of the results. I was just, as I told a TV interviewer, 'a boy from Benoni who got tired of standing in queues'.

At home, the party over, I looked back on the rich harvest I had reaped from the seeds that were sown in my youth, and couldn't help wondering what my parents, Ray and Harry Tucker, and my maternal grandparents, Mannie and Malka Goldstein, would have made of it all. I couldn't get them out of my mind.
Mannie and Malka Goldstein had never attended a cultural event in their lives. They lived in Schubitz, a shtetl (or small village) in Lithuania, one of many hundreds of such communities where the Jewish population eked out a living and cherished their religion and tradition in the face of often brutal oppression. The pogroms of the Tsarist era drove the Jewish inhabitants of Russia and Eastern Europe to leave in their thousands and seek a safer, better life in America and Britain, Palestine and South Africa. Their story was poignantly told on stage and screen in the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

The obscure village of Schubitz no longer exists. Together with its Jewish inhabitants, it was obliterated by the Nazis in 1939, but it was from there in 1904 that Mannie Stein (as he then was), leaving his wife Malka behind with their two small children, Rachel and Sam, began the long journey to South Africa. He chose his destination partly because he had heard reports that it offered exciting prospects, and partly because his sister Leah had emigrated there twelve years earlier to join her husband, Jacob Nestadt, a saddle-maker.

Mannie had never been further than the nearest large town of Kovno, where, helped by fellow Jews similarly
fleeing persecution, he boarded a train for the ancient Baltic port of Libau, from where he sailed to England. In Southampton he found himself in a transit hotel until a place became available on a ship bound for Cape Town. He arrived at the Cape in October 1904 after an interminable and uncomfortable voyage, characterised by bad food and sea-sickness. He had been travelling for seven months.

The final leg of Mannie's journey took him a thousand miles north to Johannesburg using the train service which had been inaugurated in 1891. By now, he had acquired a new name, courtesy of the immigration authorities. Unable to speak English, when asked on arrival at the Cape why he had come and what his name was, he replied, with the help of a fellow traveller, 'Gold' to the first and 'Stein' to the second. Thus, he became Mannie Goldstein. A new name, and a new beginning. Mannie's sister Leah Nestadt and her husband Jacob were living with their family in a small town called Benoni, about twenty miles east of Johannesburg - an area that would become commonly known as the East Rand. Since 'Benoni' is a name from the Book of Genesis, Mannie took the news of his final destination as a good omen (even though it means 'Son of my sorrow'). The first Jews had settled in Benoni in 1892. Five years earlier, in 1887, the official discovery of gold in the area had been recorded on the nearby farm 'Benoni'.

The Jewish immigrants learnt English by dogged persistence, persuading whoever they could to read them the newspapers and explain the meaning of the words.
Mannie joined their struggling ranks in November 1904, facing the almost insuperable difficulties of an unqualified foreigner in trying to find work. With the help of his few friends and his brother-in-law he managed to get piece-work and odd jobs. Determined to bring his family from Lithuania, he lived on the barest minimum needed to survive, saving every penny he could, but it was six long, hard years before he saw Malka and the children again.

Finally, in 1910, he was able to send for them. It was a difficult as well as a joyous reunion: Rachel and Sam, the babies he had left behind, were now eight and six respectively and, besides finding themselves in a harshly unfamiliar place, they had no idea who their father was.

Mannie found a modest house near the Nestadts and eventually opened a small leather goods shop. In 1912, Malka gave birth to a second son, Joseph (Joe), and the family was completed with the arrival of two more daughters, Lena in 1914 and Edie in 1918.

In 1922, their eldest daughter, Rachel, married Harry Tucker, also a Lithuanian immigrant, from the small town of Krok. At the age of fifteen, Harry, in common with many Jewish children, had been put on a boat out of Europe in order to avoid conscription into the Russian army. Like other parents, his own suffered traumatically in order to protect their child, doubting whether they would ever see him again. The young Harry, in the care of his cousins, the Bear family, eventually ended up in Benoni, where he met and married Rachel. (The original name, which became
'Tucker', also probably by courtesy of the immigration authorities, is in the family records as Tocker.)

In 1925 Mannie and Malka Goldstein suffered a tragedy when their eldest son, Sam, was killed. He was en route to a celebration of his twenty-first birthday when the motorcycle he was riding was hit by a car. My grandparents were devastated and barely ever referred to their loss.

Harry and Rachel became the parents of three sons. Displaying a splendid sense of symmetry, the boys arrived nicely spaced, two years apart. Maurice, the eldest, was born in 1924, Sam in 1926, and the 8 youngest of the three-me- in 1928. As is the Jewish custom, we were each named for a deceased relative, but in my case, it didn’t work out quite as intended. I was named Peretz after my great-grandfather, but the English nurse sent by my father to register my birth, chose Percival as an English name for me!

Mannie and Malka's surviving son, my uncle Joe, married Vera Forlezer in 1939. They had two children, Philip and Hazel - my cousin Hazel Feldman, who would also make a substantial and influential career in the entertainment industry.

Something unknown to them must have been in the genes of Mannie and Malka Goldstein. There's no other way I can account for my fervent pursuit of show business that made itself felt at an early age in a small East Rand town where, to all intents and purposes, I lived a very ordinary life in a loving, orthodox but essentially practical
Jewish family.

By 'ordinary' I suppose I mean average. On the whole I got along well with my two elder brothers, and with my parents whom I loved and respected. My mother was a lovely woman, warm, caring and undemanding; my father a man of great moral integrity, strict with our religious upbringing but surprisingly understanding in letting us indulge our own interests. I think his tolerance sprang partly from the fact that he worked at his butchery all the hours God gave, returning tired and uncommunicative in the evenings.

However, Dad's natural reticence disappeared at the large family gatherings that took place on Friday nights, and the even larger gettogethers on Sundays, which included many friends and neighbours and my father's cronies from the synagogue, with whom he felt thoroughly at home. In fact, outside of his work, the *shul* was my father's life, and the education of his sons - a privilege he had been denied - was his ambition. It was a common story among the Jewish immigrant population of the day.

I enjoyed my childhood. Small-town Benoni was friendly, secure and safe, and the three hundred and twenty Jewish families formed a solid and close-knit group within the larger community, whose first Jewish mayor (elected in 1929) was Morris Nestadt, Leah and Jacob's son, and my godfather as well as my cousin. My first encounter with Mr Chaim Friedstein, the *shammas* (a lay officiator) at the Benoni Synagogue, however, was certainly not enjoyable.
I'd completed my first week at St Dunstan's school, where I'd been issued with school cap and blazer. Bursting with the pride of this new image, I set off for the Saturday morning service with my elder brothers, only to be met by a barrage of fury from Mr Friedstein. Pride became humiliation as I was sent home in disgrace. The reason? The badge of St Dunstan's, adorning both cap and blazer, was an embroidered Christian cross! I was five years old, and the memory of that incident remains vivid.

After two years at St Dunstan's, I progressed to Benoni West, then, finally, Benoni High. I can't say I was noted for my academic enthusiasm or prowess, although I enjoyed English because of the set work plays and stories and loved history because of one Miss Sadie Starfield. Miss Starfield was a gifted history teacher who made the facts come alive in a gripping way, and I was so devoted to her that I actually managed a Matric History distinction.

On the whole, school life was fairly uneventful, with sport developing as a major interest. We had a lively soccer 'team', made up of friends and neighbours who used to play in our large back yard, and although I was an enthusiastic member, I was always in the shadow of my brother Sammy, whose skills later led him to play for the Province and in the South African team at the Maccabi Games. I also played tennis and had some minor success at athletics. But sport was soon joined by a new interest, indeed, a practically all-consuming passion - the live theatre.
In 1935 Gracie Fields, the famous British entertainer fondly known as the 'Lancashire lass', toured South Africa. Benoni was definitely not on the circuit for international stars, so when it was announced that Gracie was to give a concert at the local Criterion cinema, a fever of excitement gripped the community. So enormous was what we would today call the 'hype' - the radio stations doubled their already generous broadcasts of her popular songs such as Sally and The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, the newspapers were awash with pictures of the star - that I and my friends were caught up in it along with our parents.

Like everybody else the Tucker family booked tickets (price three shillings and sixpence) and from that moment life no longer seemed ordinary to me. I loved Gracie's songs on the radio, but I'd never been to a live show and had no idea what we were in for. Anticipation mounted as the great night approached, and even getting scrubbed, polished and dressed for the event seemed special. We drove the few short blocks to the theatre, my parents, my brothers and I, arriving much too early. Most of our friends had done the same, and the buzz of anticipation as we awaited 'Our Gracie' was palpable as well as audible. It increased as we took our seats in the fifth row.

The lights dimmed, and the orchestra struck up. I don't remember what they actually played, but the entrance of Gracie Fields is as vivid in my mind as if it were yesterday. Tall, fair-haired and wearing a long blue dress which sparkled under the spotlight, she seemed to me, aged
seven, the most glamorous of creatures. (In reality, she was quite a plain woman, but with a very strong and inviting personality).

I suppose Gracie Fields was the first person to win my heart. As her clear and resonant voice soared over that cinema auditorium, my love of vocal music, which was to expand and embrace the whole spectrum of music over the years, was born, and my young soul was filled with total happiness.

There was no holding me after that. Also, popular on the radio was the music of English bandleader Jack Payne. When it was announced that Payne and his musicians were to perform in Johannesburg, I begged my parents to take me. My father wasn’t at all keen, but I must have been very persuasive because he gave in. I recall the excited preparations for the outing to Johannesburg, the great metropolis with which I was unfamiliar outside of Sunday family visits to the suburbs, but it was the thrill of sitting in the stalls at the old, grand His Majesty's that gave the evening its flavour. I enjoyed the band and the supporting acts, though not with quite the fervour that Gracie had awakened. Still, the evening remains in my treasured memories because it was my first visit to a proper theatre.

That same year, 1936, I was taken to see the Pageant of Southern Africa, mounted in celebration of the fiftieth birthday of Johannesburg. It was staged in the Empire Exhibition Arena by the distinguished British director, Andre Van Gyseghem, and was a most extraordinary affair.
by any standards.

Quite literally using a cast of hundreds, if not thousands, the pageant unfolded the history of Southern Africa from the fifteenth century to the declaration of the Union in a series of set-pieces, re-enactments, tableaux, ballets, speeches and music. Different segments were performed by different groups from all over the country and Rhodesia under titles some of which I still remember: *The Bushmen, Lady Anne Barnard Gives a Ball At The Castle, Rhodes' Indaba With The Matabele*, and sixteen other similarly conceived pieces, climaxing in a Grand Finale called *A Symbol of Union*.

I was entranced by the atmosphere, the colour and the spectacle of this huge pageant, and the die was cast: I've remained star-struck - and stage-struck - ever since.
CHAPTER TWO -SETTING THE STANDARD

My sense of the theatre as another world, functioning magically and mysteriously parallel with my own, was increased by the Afrikaans-language companies who included Benoni among the many small towns to which they toured. The house where I was born, 121 Prince's Avenue, found itself directly opposite the Town Hall when this was built in 1937. The new edifice quickly became a mecca for these companies, whose earnings and goings were a constant source of fascination to me.

My first direct encounter with actors came when, aged ten, I answered a ring at the doorbell and was offered complimentary tickets for my family if they would be willing to lend their furniture to the company for that evening's performance. I was alone in the house at the time and thought nothing of eagerly granting this request, made in person by the great pioneering Afrikaner actors Hendrik and Mathilda Hanekom (not that I knew who they were at the time). When my parents came home, they found their youngest son happily helping to load the lounge suite and the verandah table and chairs onto a truck. They thought I was beyond redemption.

This was the first visit of a touring company to Benoni,
and my introduction to the world behind the scenes in the theatre. It was also my introduction to the famous Afrikaans actors of their day, the De Groats, the Hanekoms, and most famous of all, Andre Huguenet, in whose memory Pieter Toerien named a new theatre in 1977.

By the way, we did get all the furniture back.

When I started high school at the age of eleven, I was allowed the regular treat of a train trip to Johannesburg to attend the matinee at the Standard Theatre, behind the Rissik Street Post Office. A real Victorian horseshoe theatre, such as is common in England and Europe, the Standard had opened in 1891. It was the first solid, purpose-built theatre in the then gold rush town, where the colourful populace of speculators and prospectors had previously been entertained by local chorus girls and vaudeville performers at the grandly named Theatre Royal, which was actually a corrugated iron hall.

The Standard seated eight hundred people, but, with the addition of extra seats, could take a thousand. It played host from its earliest days to visiting theatre and opera companies from England, later becoming home to the company of actor-manager Leonard Rayne and his popular leading lady, Freda Godfrey. All red plush and gilt, with beautiful boxes for the elite, part of its attraction was its glamorous, romantic and intimate ambience.

I spent many wonderful hours at the Standard, particularly during the war years when the Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies - Marda Vanne Company presented
Percy Tucker

some unforgettable seasons of plays, using actors who became, and remained for many years, big names. Among them were Siegfried Mynhardt, Wensley Pithey, Rolf Lefebre, Zoe Randall, and Sid James who later found fame as a comedian in Britain (notably as one of the team in the deathless *Carry On* ... films).

Gwen and Marda - partners on stage and off- were paramount among the great pioneering professionals of the infant theatre in South Africa, as were Margaret Inglis and Nan Munro, who also formed a company soon afterwards. All four were actresses of the first rank. Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, the most illustrious of the four, enjoyed a very long and distinguished career on the British stage.

London-born, she had begun as a contralto, singing oratorio and opera before becoming known as a dramatic actress, initially at the Old Vic and at the Birmingham Rep in its heyday, later in the West End and at the Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon. She co-starred with the foremost actors of our time, most famously with John Gielgud. She was versed in the classics, both ancient and modern, and it was a lucky day for South Africa when, in 1941, she came out here, formed her company, and presented plays until 1946. Miss Ffrangcon-Davies lived to the awesome age of a hundred and one and was made a Dame of the British Empire shortly before her death in 1992. Interestingly, her partner, Marda Vanne, was briefly married to J.G. Strijdom, the granite-faced *verkrampte* who preceded Dr Verwoerd as the Republic's Prime Minister.
They were divorced well before Strijdom climbed to his political pinnacle.

With the country's men engaged in war work, both in the armed services and at home, it was not surprising that women played a significant role in theatre production. Other women whose drive and talent were at the forefront of the growth of professional theatre were the great Hungarian-born director Leontine Sagan, Muriel Alexander who founded the Johannesburg Repertory Players (Reps), actress Marjorie Gordon, and the flamboyant and redoubtable Taubie Kushlick.

I had no idea in my early years how strongly Taubie Kushlick would come to figure in my own life and in the South African theatre world. And for the theatregoing public she was a personality of enduring interest. Keeping a low profile was never in Taubie's repertoire! Born Taubie Braun, the daughter of a prosperous businessman, Taubie had arrived in Johannesburg in 1939 from her home town, Port Elizabeth- where she had staged the first ever open-air production in that city, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*- and had begun producing and directing plays at the Standard. One of the many coincidences of my life was that my science master at Benoni High was Isaac Kushlick, the brother of Taubie's husband, Dr-Philip Kushlick. It was Isaac Kushlick who, on questioning me as to how a kettle worked, elicited the reply, 'You plug it in and switch it on.' I couldn't understand what I'd said wrong ...

Though my trips to the Standard Theatre over many
years remained a highlight, my greatest treat in 1938 was a trip to the Empire Theatre in Commissioner Street to see the versatile entertainer and impersonator 'Afrique', who had headlined at the London Palladium. In fact, he was South African-born Alec Witkin. At the Empire he was appearing on the same bill as Larry Adler, to this day the world's best-known and most innovative harmonica player. Witkin's brother had married a relative of my father's, which gave me a thrilling entrée backstage.

Despite my generosity with my parents' furniture, I only saw Andre Huguenet act for the first time in 1939, when he played opposite Berdine Grunewald in *Die Kwaksalwer*, an Afrikaans translation of an English play, *The Outsider* by Dorothy Brandon. Huguenet was an actor in what was known as the 'grand style', and he was well-matched by Berdine Grunewald, a woman of strikingly dramatic good looks and a powerful emotive talent. Although my grasp of the Afrikaans language was elementary to say the least, it was an overwhelming experience.

It was not until the following year that I saw my first plays in English, sharing a 'first' with Andre Huguenet, who was acting in English for the first time. He starred in two contrasting dramas by Emlyn Williams, *Night Must Fall* (in which he played a psychopathic killer) and *The Corn is Green* (as a young Welsh miner in search of an Oxford education). Both of these were presented under the aegis of the mighty African Consolidated Theatres and were
Born Leontine Schlesinger in Budapest in 1889, Sagan's links with South Africa began in 1867 when her father spent some time in the gold-bearing district at Klerksdorp. When he had made enough money, he went back to Budapest, returning a few years later to settle in South Africa where his family joined him in 1899. Leontine gained some of her education at the German School in Johannesburg before studying acting in Germany as a pupil of the legendary Max Reinhardt. A notable stage career followed and, in 1932, she made the German film *Madchen in Uniform*.

The film won her international acclaim but, curiously, she made only one other, devoting herself to the theatre in Germany where she lived with her husband, Dr Victor Fleischer. By contrast, she also directed several productions for the famous British actor-composer Ivor Novello - the only woman ever to have directed musicals at London's Drury Lane Theatre. She returned to South Africa just before World War II, swiftly becoming a legend in the theatre here, and exerted a great influence. In those days, that influence had to be exerted over André to get him to tone down the flamboyance and declamatory postures for which he was so admired in the Afrikaans theatre.

The Viennese tenor Richard Tauber visited the country in 1939. He was doubtless more aware than I of the storm clouds gathering over Europe which would unleash World War II. I was aware only of being lost in the music and romance of my first visit to an operetta, Land of Smiles.
Very soon after, I saw my second, *Rose Marie*, at the Standard. It was produced by the Johannesburg Operatic and Dramatic Society, or JODS as it was commonly known.

It was a busy and richly formative year for an eleven-year-old boy. I saw George S. Kaufmann and Moss Hart's Pulitzer Prize-winning *You Can't Take It With You*, which exposed me for the first time to the delights of American Broadway humour; and, on a less sophisticated level, enjoyed my first big pantomime, *Robinson Crusoe*, directed by Phil Levard for African Consolidated Theatres (ACT). The war had just broken out but, despite this, Ivy Tresmand and Leslie Henson came from London to star in a show called *Going Greek*. Perhaps they were only too pleased to escape the air-raid sirens and the rush to the shelters from which actors and their audiences were not spared in wartime London. An important footnote to history of which I was totally unaware at the time was the transformation of a group called the Bantu People's Theatre into the African National Theatre. The actors performed a play called *Patriot's Pie* by Guy Routh, a trade unionist who had been involved in the formation of the Bantu People's Theatre and went on to stage two plays entitled *The Word and the Act* (author unknown) and *The Rude Criminal* by black writer, Gaur Radebe. The African National Theatre was the first radical organisation in the South African theatre, but its full history appears to be lost.

I was equally unaware of much that was distressing about South African society at the time. In common with
most privileged white children (and adults), I took entirely for granted the presence of black people as servants and workers, only dimly perceiving that a gulf existed between us and not bothering to dwell on its nature or its reasons. We were not, on the whole, a politicised family, and such problems as there were didn’t intrude into the safe haven of our cosy life in Benoni. During the early Forties people were more concerned with the course of the war, and Jews in particular had reason to fear Adolf Hitler. My parents, Harry and Rachel, chose 1939 to visit my father’s sister in America, after which they returned to Europe for the first time since they had left as children. In June 1939, they went by boat and train to Lithuania, where my father was reunited with his parents and the rest of his family for the first time in thirty-five years - a deeply emotional meeting. In late July, my parents received a telegram in Lithuania from the South African High Commission in London advising them that war appeared imminent and they should leave immediately.

Once again, the family was torn apart, and, in a sad replay of their early lives, my parents boarded a train at Kovno. The destination of the train, however, was Berlin. On arrival there, my father was ordered to accompany the Gestapo to have his papers revalidated, leaving my mother on the train, isolated and surrounded by swastika pennants and SS guards. While the Gestapo read and re-read my father’s documents, the train began to move- it was in fact shunting over to a new track for departure - and my
petrified mother, without passport or papers and my father nowhere to be seen, could do nothing. After what seemed an eternity, the train reversed back into the station, and after another hour or so had passed, my father was escorted back.

My parents caught the last boat that left Southampton for South Africa before war was declared. Three years later, my father received a telegram informing him that those members of his family, including his parents, who had remained in Krok, had perished in the Holocaust. Whether they were massacred in their village or taken to the death camps, we have never known. I remember to this day the moment when my father opened the telegram. He was turned to stone for several hours, silent and still, shattered by the horror of the news.

The war again impinged on our world in June 1944, when my brother Sammy decided to take leave from his studies and join the air force. There was much concern and discussion in the family, but Sammy was not to be deterred and went to Port Elizabeth where he trained as a navigator. It was only many years later that we learned of his top-secret training flights to North Africa, undertaken by the SAAF in anticipation of possibly having to join in the hostilities against the Japanese in the Far East war. It was a far more serious and emotional matter when, three years later, in the face of parental opposition (born of fear for his safety), he left to join the Israeli Army and fight in the 1948 War of Independence.
While my parents were away, Grandpa Mannie and Grannie Malka moved in to our house to look after me, Sammy and Mossie (as brother Maurice was known). My aunts, Edie and Lena came too. Lena, a schoolteacher, taught my Standard Five class at Benoni West, an event which caused me some considerable embarrassment since she persisted in addressing me as 'Percy' in front of my classmates. It just wasn't done for a boy to be called by anything but his surname, and it represented a painful loss of dignity. My status was restored on the day that the headmaster assembled the pupils and chose me - addressing me as 'Tucker' of course - to go out and buy a newspaper for the school so that he could read us the declaration of war. I regarded this small errand as an enormous honour. For the rest, life took its usual course, and while I was as interested as the next boy in staging pretend battles and seeing newsreels about the war at the movies, or bioscope as we used to call it, I kept an eager eye on theatrical events, which included a JODS production of *Monsieur Beaucaire* and a season at the Standard produced by Andre Huguenet and the great Jewish actress Sarah Sylvia. Madam Sylvia's son, Alfred Herbert, would become a dedicated promoter and protector of black musicians in later years, bringing Township Jazz to white audiences.

The Johannesburg Repertory Players, or Reps, presented Shaw's *The Millionairess* and Noel Coward's *Fumed Oak* at the Standard. *The Millionairess*, which opened just before the outbreak of the war, was the first
production staged to raise funds for refugees. Leontine Sagan's production of *The Corn is Green*, which I had seen in Benoni, was staged at the Library Theatre in Johannesburg, along with *They Walk Alone*, which she also directed. This miserable apology for a theatre was situated in the Johannesburg Public Library, and much as many regret the passing of the Standard, we can only give thanks that the Library is no more. Nevertheless, in those early days when the greatest obstacle to the growth of the theatre was a lack of venues, the profession and its audiences had cause to be grateful for its use, and it housed many excellent productions over the years.

It was at the Library Theatre that the Reps produced the play version of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, which starred Sid James. They also mounted Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but while the opening night audience was revelling in one of the wittiest comedies ever written in English, Holland was falling to the Nazi invasion. The rest of the season was blighted by this tragedy which signalled the menacing escalation of the war.

One of the stalwarts of the Reps was Minna Schneier who, also in 1940, directed American playwright Robert Ardrey's *Thunder Rock* for them. (Ardrey, years later, married Berdine Grunewald). Shortly after the run ended, she married one of the cast members, Sydney Witkin (brother of none other than Alec 'Afrique' Witkin). The Schneier family were in the property business where they were associates of a family called London. The Benoni
branch of the London family came to play a vital part in my life, and, to add to the coincidence, when I worked as an accountant, I was allocated the audit of the Schneier and London business accounts.

The Union Defence Force Entertainment Unit was formed in 1940, engaging the services of several people who would go on to make a name for themselves in the field of entertainment, among them the organiser Frank Rogaly, actor Gordon Mulholland, orchestral conductor Leo Quayle, and musical director Harry Rabinowitz who made a notable career in England.

Throughout this first year of the war proper, the local theatre continued to provide distraction for worried audiences. JODS ventured into Gilbert and Sullivan with *The Gondoliers* and *The Pirates of Penzance*, while a production of J.B. Priestley’s *When We Are Married* featured an attractive and gifted young actress named Moira Lister, of whom much more would be heard.

July 1941 was the month of my Barmitzvah. Because of the war, the celebration was modest, a luncheon for family and friends at our house, but I received the usual quota of fountain pens, shaving sets, leather wallets and, best of all, gifts of money which would one day stand me in very good stead. I was now a man in the eyes of the religious authorities, but my feelings remained those of a thirteen-year-old adolescent who was overjoyed to be free of Hebrew classes and the accompanying blows that were administered by the teacher whenever concentration
flagged.

In 1942, I saw Andre Huguenet in an Afrikaans version of *Absalom, My Son*, and another great Afrikaner actor, Pierre de Wet, playing in the Afrikaans translation of *Gaslight* for Huguenet’s company, Teatergroep. He was wonderful, opposite Berdine Grunewald, as the calculating husband who drives his wife mad, a role taken by Anton Walbrook and, later, Charles Boyer, in the two popular film versions of the play. Pierre was a pioneering actor and director when the local film industry began making giant strides at Killarney Studios (now the site of the shopping mall). At various times during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, he managed the Civic Theatre, and we became close colleagues and great friends, living through many an administrative crisis together.

The bill of fare in 1941 was a rich one, offering something for everyone. Frank Rogaly’s first production of a wartime revue called *Springbok Follies* was a hit at the Empire Theatre; Reps successes included Kaufmann and Hart’s uproarious *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and, by way of stark contrast, Pirandello’s drama, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Both of these starred Huguenet and Margaret Inglis, under Leontine Sagan’s direction. The Reps also gave a couple of Shaw plays, while Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and Marda Vanne were presenting J.M. Barrie’s *Quality Street* and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. JODS contributed two operettas, *Lilac Domino* and *Ruddigore*; Bertha Egnos, another name which would
become famous in later years, presented *Swing 1941* at the Empire, and in December I saw Taubie Kushlick on stage for the first time, acting for the Reps in *Double Door*.

This was also the year when ballet teacher Teda de Moor got together groups of black labourers and domestic workers, and choreographed programmes which enacted their struggles to adapt to life in Johannesburg. This enterprise marked the formation of the Black Dance Drama. For Christmas Phil Levard, who produced all African Theatres' major shows, directed *Alice in Wonderland* at the Standard, cast entirely with children.

In October 1942, JODS had mounted an exotic production at the Empire of *Chu Chin Chow*, one of the hit musicals of the West End and Broadway, and at the same theatre, at the end of the year African Theatres brought a pantomime version of *The Sleeping Beauty*. The highlight of the Reps' year was undoubtedly their production of Clare Boothe's *The Women*. Directed by Leontine Sagan, the large cast included Moira Lister, who left for London and stardom not long afterwards. The Reps' sophisticated and varied programme of drama also included Emlyn Williams' *The Late Christopher Bean*, S.N. Behrman's English version of Jean Giraudoux's *Amphitryon 38*, and Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie* (the film version of which was Garbo's first talking picture).

The most fascinating item in the Anna Christie programme is one usually overlooked by playgoers - the names of the backstage workers. Taubie Kushlick,
displaying rare self-effacement, had taken on the always thankless task of stage manager; couturier Louis Jacobson, a flamboyant and outrageous German immigrant and a great character in social and theatrical circles, had charge of the costumes, and the props were organised by John Cranko and Cecilia Sonnenberg. With Rene Ahrenson, Cecilia (like Helen Suzman, an aunt of actress Janet Suzman) would later found the Cape's Open-Air Shakespeare at Maynardville, and, later still, was one of the Company of Four with Leonard Schach, Donald Inskip and Rene Ahrenson.

Cecilia's co-worker on Anna Christie, Rustenburg-born John Cranko, had choreographed his first ballet at the age of sixteen for the Cape Town Ballet Club. At the end of the war he became resident choreographer for the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet in London, achieving fame with *Pineapple Poll* as well as many other subsequent works, and was then appointed artistic director of the Stuttgart Ballet in 1960. Hailed as 'The Stuttgart Miracle', he transformed that company, and it was a tremendous loss to world ballet when he died tragically in 1973 at the age of forty-six, choking while on board a plane from the USA to Stuttgart.

Actor Siegfried Mynhardt formed a company of his own in 1942. This group staged *Die Rooi Puik* (*The Red Wig*) - which Siggie's wife Joss, a woman with an outrageous sense of humour, dubbed 'The Red Prick' - and an Afrikaans translation of *Ladies in Retirement*, starring Berdine Grunewald and another leading lady of substance,
Lydia Lindeque. It was so successful that it was taken 'Up North' for the entertainment of South African troops based in the North African desert.

A huge success of 1943 was No, No Nanette staged by Phil Levard at the Empire. This effervescent musical, a Broadway hit of 1925, keeps coming back like its evergreen songs- 'Tea for Two' and 'I Want to be Happy' among them - and enjoyed a blockbusting revival on Broadway in 1971, with its original star, Ruby Keeler. In 1972 Taubie Kushlick presented it at the Alexander Theatre for the entertainment of a new generation of theatregoers. The lead was played by Carole Gray, a South African who had found West End success and co-starred with Cliff Richard in The Young Ones.

In 1943, however, Taubie was busy with Emlyn Williams' The Light of Heart, which she directed for the Reps with Shirley Hepburn and Frank Douglass. Also at the Reps, Muriel Alexander directed The Flashing Stream with Sydney Witkin and Minna Schneier in the cast, and Margaret Inglis directed her first Reps production, Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufmann's Stage Door. This most entertaining peek behind the scenes of the struggle for stardom, was filmed in 1937 with Katharine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers in the leads.

But the play that had the most impact on me at the time was Lillian Hellman's Watch on the Rhine, which Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and Marda Vanne presented in their season at the Standard. Gwen and Derick Redman
played the leads in this sombre and persuasive drama that exposes Fascist thinking and warns of its dangers. It was a most appropriate and thought-provoking piece to listen to while Europe was being torn apart by Fascists.

Nineteen forty-four was my Matric year. Many a long hour was spent walking round our large back yard, learning by rote all those things that didn't particularly appeal to me and praying that my 'spots' would come up in the final exams. This was a practice that would continue throughout my years at university.

Despite having to study, I managed to keep track of developments in the theatre and find time to see a remarkably large number of plays. Among the highlights was an enchanting production of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, starring Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, Margaret Inglis, Marda Vanne and Siegfried Mynhardt. During this year, the author of this dazzling comedy visited South Africa at the behest of the Prime Minister's wife, Ouma Smuts, to raise funds for her war charities.

Through the huge press coverage of the event, I became acquainted with the fame of 'The Master' as Coward (later Sir Noël) was widely known. Among the many stories of his off-the-cuff wit, one gained particular currency during his tour of South Africa: asked by a reporter from *The Star* to contribute a quote, Coward replied 'Twinkle'!

I saw Nan Munro and Margaret Inglis in *My Sister*
Eileen, the first production for their own company; Elizabeth Renfield starring as Sadie Thompson in Somerset Maugham's Rain; productions of Shaw's weighty moral debate, The Doctor's Dilemma, and Sheridan's eighteenth-century satire The Rivals at the Reps, alongside Clemence Dane's Granite and the charming Life with Father.

But my abiding memory of 1944 was a production of Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca, in which the part of the sinister housekeeper Mrs Danvers (immortalised on screen by Judith Anderson) was played by Taubie Kushlick. Her performance was one of powerful perfection, and even several return viewings of Hitchcock's film with Dame Judith in threatening close-up, have not obliterated the lasting image of Taubie imprinted on my then fifteen-year-old mind.
With Matric exams over, I enrolled in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of the Witwatersrand. My fantasy of a career in show business seemed destined to remain just that, since I could see no practical way of turning it into a reality, and I accepted without question that I must meet my father's not unreasonable expectations that I should get some qualification. My eldest brother Mossy had joined my father in his business which, by now, was no longer a butchery, but a supply company for refrigeration and butchers' equipment; and Sammy was at Medical School.

After a little thought and a lot of discussion, I took the line of least resistance, settling for the practicality of a B. Com Accountancy, and in February 1945, having pleasantly idled away the long vacation, I presented myself for lectures. After the cosy familiarity of Benoni High, the Wits campus, with thousands of students swarming up and down its main avenue and in and out of its several buildings, seemed initially a bit intimidating and bewildering, but I soon settled into a routine.

My life was dictated by railway timetables. I would leave the house in Benoni at 6.30 a.m. in order to catch a train and then a bus to my first lecture; the last lectures
were at the end of the day and, in my third and fourth years, when I was doing articles and studying part-time, I finished at 9 p.m., caught the 10 p.m. train home, prepared my work for the next day and started all over again. I became a dab-hand at belting for trains at the last possible moment, which began a lifelong habit of running rather than walking, and one which caused some amazement and a degree of havoc in later years when I hurtled up and down the corridors of Computicket.

The boys were returning from the army, many of them attending university still in uniform. Their numbers swelled the student ranks to the extent that there were sometimes as many as five hundred of us packed into a lecture hall. The most memorable of these occasions was the first lecture in Economic History. In came the lecturer, a gorgeous young woman whose looks immediately provoked a loud and enthusiastic chorus of wolf whistles and cat-calls. She was not only beautiful but, as we learned within seconds, charismatic and frighteningly authoritative, for she quelled this outburst with a penetrating look and a few succinct and threatening words of warning. Her name was Helen Suzman.

Almost half-a-century later, driving back from the Million Dollar Golf Tournament at Sun City which we attended together, I reminded her of this incident. By then, I had got to know her, and had worked on her behalf in several election campaigns. My admiration for this remarkable woman grew stronger over the many years that
I watched her tireless fight against injustice. In her parliamentary career, she dealt with her coarse-grained opponents in much the same manner as she had dealt with a crowd of rowdy students.

Thanks to Helen, Economic History remained my favourite subject, much as History had been with Miss Starfield at school - though I suspect that this interest had been sparked by the fires of the South Africa Pageant almost ten years earlier. For the rest, I ploughed through the necessary drudgery of my courses, which included Afrikaans and Portuguese, the latter chosen in a wild moment when I thought it might be useful for a holiday in Lourenco Marques! Needless to say, I can't speak a word of it. I also relieved what I considered the tedium of classes in accounting and tax law by sneaking into the music appreciation lectures and, like all students, enjoyed the involvement with activities like the annual Rag.

It was, however the East Rand Theatre Club rather than university life, which gave me the most satisfaction. In those days, much of the theatre in the country was provided by, amateur companies, and one of the best of these was the East Rand Theatre Club. I discovered this organisation during my last year at school, when it had just been formed as an amalgamation of the Benoni Drama Circle, the Benoni Combined Arts Group and the Boksburg Amateur Players. It was run with indefatigable energy, enthusiasm and high ideals by Issy Goodman and his
cousins Ethel and Zelma London, schoolteachers by profession. Despite the difference in our ages, they were to become two of my most treasured friends until their deaths. (Ethel died in 1991 aged seventy-nine; Zelma, aged seventy-eight, was at my farewell at the Civic. Sadly, she died a fortnight later). The East Rand Theatre Club would soon open the doors to my eventual future.

The Club productions rehearsed and played in the Benoni Town Hall. This, of course, made it very easy for me to wander in from my home across the road, and very soon, my enthusiasm being evident, I was roped in as a dogsbody, happy to help with any humble chore.

The policy of the Theatre Club was to present a wide-ranging and imaginative programme of plays produced to the highest standards possible. Since we were not a money-making organisation, we could afford the luxury of including world-class plays that were not necessarily commercial, and we could be assured of an audience from our large and loyal following. The Club also believed in providing opportunities for local playwrights, and thus it was that work by James Ambrose Brown, Percy Baneshik (later the doyen of South African theatre critics), Louis Ife, novelist Noel Langley, actress Mary Mitchell and Sidney Gill (editor of the Benoni City Times) came to be performed.

But the magic ingredient that ensured the success of the recipe was the policy of using membership and box office funds to hire professional and semi-professional directors. Over the years the Club could boast productions
by such names as Taubie Kushlick, Leonard Schach, Anthony Farmer, Cecil Williams, Margaret Inglis, Minna Schneier, Leon Gluckman, and even the formidable Leontine Sagan.

It's difficult to put into words my fascination with watching these people at work, seeing them fashion a production piece by piece, like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. To watch the text gradually come alive as the actors, under the guidance of these gifted and intelligent directors, built up their characters was, to me, a sort of miracle. So wide-eyed and stage-struck was I at sixteen (and, some might suggest, still am at sixty plus), that even the rather laborious process of 'blocking' the play - that is, working out the basic moves of who would walk, sit or stand where, seemed to me an exciting process.

Our casts at the East Rand Theatre Club were fully amateur in the strictest sense. They all had other occupations, earned no money from acting, and had to rehearse at night and over weekends. They did it for sheer pleasure and, in the main, had no professional aspirations. Only a tiny handful over the years went on to act professionally: Mary Mitchell, Molly Seftel, Ronald Wallace and, much later, Elaine Lee; while a young actor called Ian Bernhardt would go on to become a producer and a towering figure in the development of black theatre. Which is not to say that the amateurs weren't competent, or, often, talented.

From a purely personal point of view, my spells in the
Benoni Town Hall (often until three or four in the morning) in the company of the visiting directors and various regular supporters of our productions, started associations that would become integral to my life when I finally found my niche in show business. One of the most important was Mr (later Dr) P.P.B. Breytenbach. Affectionately known as 'Breytie', this visionary school headmaster who was President of the Federation of Amateur Theatrical Societies of Southern Africa (FATSSA), was soon to become the first director of the National Theatre Organization, the first director of the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) and a founder trustee of the Market Theatre. Muriel Alexander, the dedicated founder of the Reps, and Percy Baneshik were among others I would get to know well.

The Theatre Club, on average, put on three plays a year, the dates of which conveniently coincided with my varsity vacs. This left enough evenings and Saturday afternoons for me to take my trips to the Johannesburg theatres, catch up on the latest films, and even spare some time to nurture my interest in sport. I've never understood why people assume that an interest in the arts makes a person 'arty' and thereby uninterested in anything else ... How I managed to qualify as an accountant in the midst of all this, must remain an unsolved mystery.

Thanks to the East Rand Theatre Club, I had the privilege of watching Leontine Sagan at work in 1950 when she directed a production of *In Theatre Street*, an entertainment translated from the French by Ashley Duke.
An elegant woman of powerful presence, she was also autocratic. Her justifiable belief in her own abilities meant that she brooked no argument, and she was quite capable of being unpleasant in a peculiarly Teutonic way when displeased. Of course, people put up with her slights because she was unquestionably an inestimable asset to what was, I later realised, a fledgling profession in this country.

During these years, too, I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies. In contrast to Miss Sagan, Miss Ffrangcon Davies was gentle, charming and interested. With her permission, I took to calling on her in her dressing room at the Standard whenever I had seen one of her performances, and she was always a bright light of encouragement to me. Her return to England after the war was a severe loss to South African theatre but, happily, she did occasionally come back to work here.

In 1953, while Gwen was holidaying in South Africa with Marda Vanne, Brian Brooke persuaded them to play the leads in *Waters of the Moon*. A prestige success in London, the play did well in Cape Town, but Johannesburg audiences simply didn't plug in to N.C. Hunter's wistful, impressionistic drama about a group of lonely, unhappy people living out their lives in a remote country boarding house.

Marda Vanne made her last appearance for the National Theatre in Eugene O'Neill's *A Touch of the Poet* in 1961. This play, which, like most NT productions, toured
the country, was staged at the Alexander (formerly the Reps) in Johannesburg. It was directed by the eminent and fascinating American actress and director, Margaret Webster, and the male lead was Johann Nell, a major star of the Afrikaans theatre who, with his splendid physique, good looks and resounding voice, was the natural successor to the great Andre Huguenet. Like a number of his colleagues, Johann Nell's career and life were ultimately destroyed by alcoholism.

But to return to the mid-Forties: The end of the war was celebrated by African Consolidated Theatres (ACT) with Phil Levard's production of a revue called *The Peepshow* of 1945. It was remarkable for its running time of three hours, during which we were treated to no less than twenty changes of scene. Among the several Reps productions during 1945 was Chekhov's *The Seagull* in which Taubie Kushlick was typecast as the self-dramatising actress, Madame Arkadina, and Thornton Wilder's symphony of American life, *Our Town*, which Taubie directed. Her lead actress was Berdine Grunewald's sister Enid, an acknowledged beauty who became a successful model under her married name of Enid Munnik. After her divorce from Frank Munnik, she went to England where she married the British film producer and director Roy Boulting.

The lovely Ivy Tresmand once again starred in the Empire pantomime, which, that year, was *Aladdin*, Gwen
and Marda staged *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Wensley Pithey as Falstaff, and the Munro-Inglis company presented *Ladies in Retirement*, a popular piece in which Taubie Kushlick played the lead. Indeed, it was a very busy year for Taubie who, once again, provided me with my personal highlight when she played Regina Giddens in Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*. The role of Regina, the sensual, manipulative and utterly ruthless wife who, ignoring her husband's pleas for help, withholds his medicine and watches him die, was created by Tallulah Bankhead in the original Broadway production. Bette Davis won an Oscar for her screen portrayal of this viper, and Taubie gave both these brilliant actresses a run for their money.

During 1946, the handsome Hollywood film star Tyrone Power paid a visit to Johannesburg to promote *The Razor's Edge*. Such an event was hardly an everyday occurrence and, with Power at the height of his fame after such films as *The Mark of Zorro, Rose of Washington Square* and *This Above All* (co-starring Joan Fontaine who would play the Johannesburg Civic Theatre twenty years later), the excitement among the thousands of fans (of whom I was one) gathered to welcome him outside the old Langham Hotel, was intense.

October saw the arrival of George Formby, the Lancashire comedian and entertainer famous for his self-accompaniment on the ukulele and his double-entendre music-hall songs. He was welcomed with a tickertape
parade and appeared for ACT at the Colosseum Theatre.

Meanwhile, the regular local producers, their possibilities enriched by the return of actors from the war, continued to provide the staple diet for theatregoers. The Reps offered half-a-dozen plays ranging from Somerset Maugham’s *The Circle* through Noel Coward’s *Tonight at 8.30* to a thriller called *Play with Fire*, whose cast included a young man named Michael Venables, later better known as a theatre critic for the *Rand Daily Mail* and various Cape papers.

The Standard had never had a busier year. Everybody, it seemed, was getting in on the act of forming his or her own company. Actress Elizabeth Renfield - and Company - rather ambitiously presented Eugene O’Neill’s dark, gothic and monumental *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and an adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* in which Johann Nell played the brooding Heathcliff opposite Miss Renfield’s Cathy; Wensley Pithey - and Company - staged *Laburnum Grove* starring Siegfried Mynhardt; the Theatre Guild Company gave us *The Lady of the Rose*. The Munro-Inglis company produced Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, and finally, in December, Taubie Kushlick directed and played in *George Washington Slept Here* with Wensley Pithey and Cordon Mulholland.

The Ffrangcon-Davies-Vanne company presented *The Wind of Heaven*, in which they starred with Zoe Randall (who was married for some years to puppeteer John Wright), Wensley Pithey and Sid James. This was one of
Emlyn Williams' lesser known plays and, I recall, one of Gwen and Marda's lesser achievements. Perfectionists though they were, in this production Gwen gave a rather one-note performance, while Marda's Welsh accent was rather closer to that of her native Afrikaans. They redeemed themselves with Gwen's outstanding production of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*, in which she sparkled as Natalia, and Marda convinced as Natalia's mother-in-law. The memory is bitter-sweet for this was their last production before they returned to England.

The formation of the Johannesburg City Orchestra in 1946 was of great cultural importance. Their first concert, under the baton of the prominent British conductor Malcolm (later Sir Malcolm) Sargent, was given in association with the SABC at the City Hall, which would remain their home for some years. The programme included works by Vaughan-Williams, Handel, Elgar and Berlioz, culminating with Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 6, the 'Pathétique'. This orchestra, which provided many distinguished guest conductors and first-class concerts, was dissolved at the end of 1953, and its members were absorbed into the SABC Orchestra, with Jeremy Schulman, Edgar Cree and Anton Hartman as conductors.

A milestone for the city of Johannesburg was the opening of the new His Majesty's Theatre, in His Majesty's Buildings, on Commissioner Street between Eloff and Joubert. This huge and handsome edifice had been under construction from 1937 to 1941 but, because of the
exigencies of the war years, the theatre stood empty until, with the equipment finally installed, it opened in December 1946. The inaugural ceremony was conducted by the Prime Minister, General Smuts, and the opening show was another Phil Levard production of *Robinson Crusoe*. With its Cellar restaurant below, soon to be joined by the Roof Garden restaurant atop, it was worth the wait.

The elegant restaurants became fashionable and popular haunts for many years to come, and the theatre housed a dazzling variety of entertainments ranging from imported musical spectulars to opera, ballet, plays and major films. This treasure house died with the death of the city, along with the other great theatre-cum-picture palaces, the Colosseum and the Empire, and, today, a discount store stands on the site. Such is progress.

With the opening of His Majesty's, the city centre had its own mini Broadway or West End, with the Empire and the Colosseum neighbours to the new theatre on Commissioner Street, the Standard just around the corner in Market Street, and the Plaza on Rissik. The camaraderie that existed within the profession was extraordinary: the managements co-existed in a spirit of cordial co-operation, the actors, directors and actor-managers all worked for and with each other, and there was no sense of the rivalry and petty backbiting which, inevitably, crept in over the years as competition intensified and audiences diminished.

But, alas, the cluster was about to lose its cherished temple of the best classical and commercial drama. In 1947
the city council announced that the Standard had been inspected and found wanting and would have to close. Managements and audiences were dismayed and outraged, but the council stood firm. That the theatre had become a rat-infested fire hazard was not in dispute, but it's nonetheless one of the aesthetic tragedies of Johannesburg that this building of such character no longer exists. The site is now the less than salubrious Ernest Oppenheimer Park and there is not even a commemorative plaque.

With the shadow of closure over the building, the actress Marjorie Cordon (and her Company!), in association with ACT, presented four plays, including Coward's *Design for Living*; Siegfried Mynhardt directed *Laura* for the Reps, and the Munro-Inglis Company staged their last Standard Theatre production, Somerset Maugham's *Lady Frederick* in which Siggie Mynhardt starred.

I was present on the last Saturday in September 1947, when the final curtain came down on the Standard Theatre, cutting short the run of *Golden Boy*, a hard-hitting drama by the distinguished American playwright Clifford Odets. Henry Gilbert's production cast British professional lightweight boxing champion Eric Boon, acting for the first and last time, as the aspiring and sensitive young violinist, forced by poverty into the boxing ring with tragic results.

The significance of the play as the last production at the Standard was entirely overshadowed by the fate of the young English actress who played the ingenue lead. Glamorous Gay Gibson left to return to England on board
the Durban Castle shortly after the run of the play. A week or so into the voyage, she was pushed through the porthole of her cabin by James Camb, a handsome young steward with whom she had been making love. He claimed she died suddenly in his embrace; the prosecution and jury thought otherwise. Camb was convicted of murder in one of the most celebrated and salacious of post-war murder trials. The unfortunate victim's reputation was publicly tarnished as part of Camb's defence, and the tale reached a wider audience through the press than any play at the Standard Theatre had ever done.

When, at very short notice, the closing date was set for the Standard, Taubie Kushlick and Margaret Inglis organised a banner-carrying protest march through the centre of Johannesburg. Every available person connected with show business, including me, joined in, but though we created quite a stir with our pleas on behalf of this Victorian jewel, it was to no avail. To add insult to injury, the building was left to lie derelict for nine years before the demolishers finally moved in in 1956. Just weeks before, Taubie and Peggy once again staged a march, even bigger than the first one, in which uniformed schoolgirls from Johannesburg Girls' High joined, but the municipality remained as unbending as ever. A chapter was closed but, by then, at least we had a new, purpose-built venue in the Reps Theatre (later the Alexander) which, in time became home to PACT.

The closure of the theatre and the Gay Gibson scandal
were not the only excitements of the year. Back in February, the whole country had been swept up in the Royal visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth, accompanied by the two young princesses, Margaret and Elizabeth.

Lawrence Tibbett, the great star of New York's Metropolitan Opera, graced a production of *Rigoletto* at His Majesty's, and gave a recital at the Plaza Theatre. Although I was already an opera enthusiast, this was my first experience of seeing and hearing a singer of his stature. No sooner had he departed when soprano Joan Hammond, at the height of her career, arrived to add to my delight, and concert pianist Benno Moiseiwitsch came on a tour.

Ivor Novello, famed for his sensitive good looks as well as his talent, was imported with his full company by African Theatres to tour his musical *Perchance to Dream*, appearing at His Majesty's in Johannesburg and staying (as did most major visiting stars) at the Carlton Hotel. This grand and gracious building in Eloff Street suffered the same fate as so many other period structures when it was demolished in 1964.

Ivor Novello died of tuberculosis at the age of fifty-three. He was a great loss to the world of musical comedy, which he'd enriched with a wealth of melodies both soaring and wistful (among the best-known are 'Someday My Heart Will Awake', 'We'll Gather Lilacs' and, of course, the famous World War I song beloved of British troops, 'Keep the Home Fires Burning'), which graced a series of 'Ruritanian' romances- tales of princes, princesses and kings in
imaginary European kingdoms.

While in South Africa, Novella began composing his final operetta, the glorious *King’s Rhapsody*, which made a star of Vanessa Lee in London. Miss Lee, who had been here in *Perchance to Dream* would return in 1968 for Pieter Toerien, but it was Muriel Barron who took her role when *King’s Rhapsody* came here in 1953.

In that largely imported company was a stage manager and small-part player named Anthony Farmer who would one day make a significant contribution to the professional theatre here as both designer and director. I got to know him very well when he came back to Johannesburg and introduced him to the East Rand Theatre Club which enjoyed the benefit of his versatile services. Also, in the King’s Rhapsody company was a young South African named Aubrey Louw, who played a manservant. He went on to a distinguished career in production before leaving the unsocial hours of the live theatre to join me at Show Service and Computicket.

I was entranced by Ivor Novella, not only by the glittering glamour and bitter-sweet poignancy of his show, but by the aura of the man himself, and I frequently lurked outside the Carlton, waiting for him to appear and walk across to the theatre. Eventually, I plucked up the courage to stop him and ask for his autograph on my programme and, with the naivety of eighteen-year-old youth, I complimented him on the show and asked whether I might call on him backstage, which I did after my third visit to
Perchance to Dream.

In the star dressing room at His Majesty's this charming and courteous man handed me a glass of champagne, which gave me a bad moment as I wondered what to do with it. I awkwardly gulped it down and, sad to relate, my relationship with this desirable drink hasn’t altered since.

Meanwhile, back in the real world, the Reps continued their annual quota of productions, which included Shaw's Mrs Warren's Profession directed by Leontine Sagan and starring Lydia Lindeque, and a melodrama called The Silver Cord which had the ill-fated Gay Gibson in the company. Muriel Alexander directed her last play for the Reps, Joan of Lorraine, at the Wits University Great Hall. Marjorie Sturman, Poppy Frames and Ivy Conmee founded the Johannesburg Festival Ballet, and the Afrikaans theatre, for so long confined to touring to all points of the compass and playing in the village halls of the platteland, took a major step forward with an Afrikaans production of Hamlet staged at His Majesty’s. Siegfried Mynhardt, later himself to play the Prince of Denmark in English, directed André Huguenet in the role, and it was during this production that I met Michal Grobbelaar, then a young actor who was playing Marcellus. He went on to become a force in the administrative sphere of the theatre and, our paths having crossed many times, we worked together daily when he became executive director of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, from its opening in 1962 until his retirement in

At another University Great Hall, Rhodes in Grahamstown, a young law student named Lean Gluckman directed T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* with a cast of students. The production caused something of a sensation and was brought to the Wits Great Hall the following year. After the Grahamstown opening, the drama critic of South Africa's oldest newspaper, *Grocott's Daily Mail*, wrote that 'It is difficult after seeing this play to suppress encomiums ... for Lean Gluckman's superb interpretation of the play ... ' The law lost out to the theatre, and a star was born to shine in the South African theatre firmament for many years.

But of all the events of an action-packed 1947, there was no development more significant for those who cared about the future of our theatre than the formation of the National Theatre Organization which, under the chairmanship of Mr P.P.B. Breytenbach, and with government financial backing, changed the face of the post-war theatrical map in South Africa.
CHAPTER FOUR
GOOD TIMES AND BAD

In 1945 the Eybers Commission had been set up to enquire into the social and educational needs of the country in the aftermath of World War II. The Commission’s report, which included a section on the value of theatrical activity, led to the formation of the National Council for Adult Education under the direction of Dr G.W. Eybers, who happened to love the theatre. Breytie, who loved the theatre even more, was a happy appointment to the Council, and under his aegis a special sub-committee was set up to deal with theatre matters.

From these beginnings, with many convulsions and organisational difficulties along the way, the National Theatre Organization - the first in the British Commonwealth - came into being in a remarkably short time. Breytie chaired the NT Committee, whose members were Steve Naude as secretary, Anna Neethling-Pohl and Major Myles Bourke, who was the driving force behind a scheme to employ former members of the Defence Force Entertainment Unit. They were soon joined by Professor Donald Inskip of the University of Cape Town’s Little Theatre.

The National Theatre’s policy was both comprehensive and ambitious: to promote and present the best in drama,
opera, music and ballet throughout the country, and to provide venues and training. The Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences, Mr J.H. Hofmeyr, allocated a grant of £400 and a loan of £3,600 to launch the scheme on an experimental basis, stipulating the enterprise must be bilingual. The monies, however, were granted to the Federation of Amateur Theatrical Societies of Southern Africa (FATSSA), effectively making them the paymaster for the new organisation.

Though the funding was the answer to years of pleading by concerned individuals and organisations for governmental support of the performing arts, the handful of full-time professionals objected to being under the control of amateurs. After much debate, that plan was dropped, Breytie's committee became the NTO Board of Control, and Leontine Sagan and Andre Huguenet were co-opted to serve, along with representatives of the Minister. In the next few years, further 32 additions to the board included Marda Vanne, and Elizabeth Sneddon (future Head of Drama at Natal University).

The National Theatre's primary aim was to educate and draw in a regular theatregoing public who would appreciate the great classic plays which require substantial resources to stage, and to encourage indigenous playwrights to build up a body of work. Though it sought to serve the Afrikaans and English language groups equally, black cultural needs and aspirations were completely ignored.

In the early days, the English and Afrikaans companies
would tour together, alternating performances and serving each other backstage. The tours lasted anything up to a year, playing every broken-down hall in the remotest four corners of the country, until it became evident that this was an uneconomical way of planning the programme, and one which failed to maximise the NTO's potential. In due course, the tours were better-planned, and certain major productions were mounted specifically for the major cities.

In those early years André Huguenet was the Company Manager and resident mentor to his colleagues. Leon Gluckman wrote of André that he '... was well-known for his bark and his bite. He had a sharp wit, and often, when faced with stupidity or incompetence, an impatient tongue. He was the terror of the town hall caretakers and local police in dorps throughout the country ... He spent his whole life trying to tempt, cajole or bully South African farmers, office workers and the businessmen into the theatre. His repertoire included everything from Shakespeare to striptease and the most elementary form of "skiet en donner". His taste, however, remained firmly anchored to what was noble and good.'

The National Theatre's inaugural season was an undoubted success. In their first year, the Afrikaans company presented Altyd My Liefste, a translation of Lessing's German classic Minna von Barnhelm directed by Truida Pohl, and Nag Het die Wind Gebring) an indigenous play by W.A. de Klerk, directed by Anna Neethling-Pohl. The English company offered J.M. Barrie's Dear Brutus and
J.B. Priestley's enduring moral fable, *An Inspector Calls* both directed by Leontine Sagan. These productions toured throughout 1948, with a company which included Huguenet, of course, Siegfried Mynhardt, Leon Gluckman, Frank Wise, Lorna Cowell, Vivienne Drummond, Mathilda Hanekom and Enone van den Bergh, all enjoying the novelty of a regular salary.

The year 1948 brought a change in South Africa's political fortunes which signified the beginning of many long, dark years. Bizarrely, my own awareness that the National Party under Dr D.F. Malan had ousted General Smuts and the United Party from office, came about through a curious happening at the East Rand Theatre Club.

On the night of the general election on 28 May 1948, I was working backstage at a performance of *The Guinea Pig*, a highly charged English drama about a schoolmaster, directed by Taubie Kushlick. There was an unusually tense atmosphere in the town hall, which was also the local polling station. After the interval, we noticed that a substantial number of the audience failed to return to their seats. This was particularly puzzling in view of the fact that the run had been extended in response to the heavy demand for seats. When the show was over we learnt that the missing playgoers had been too depressed by the early election results to sit through the remainder of the evening. Next morning, when all the results were posted, the Tucker
family, like all other United Party supporters, knew that our worst fears had been realised.

Quite inexplicably, since all matters electrical are beyond my comprehension, I had been appointed lighting technician for *The Guinea Pig*. I had another hapless enthusiast as an assistant and approached the dress rehearsal with some trepidation. I was amazed when I plugged everything in, switched on and it all worked.

At the time, Sir Michael Balcon, the great British film producer, was on a visit to South Africa. (He had married Aileen Leatherman, an English child actress who had grown up in South Africa; their grandson is the actor Daniel Day Lewis). On the opening night of *The Guinea Pig* we learnt that Taubie had persuaded Sir Michael to attend.

The first two acts- those were the days of three-act plays- went beautifully. Came the third, where the action called for Ethel London to walk onto the darkened stage, cross it, and switch on a lamp adjacent to which she would play a very dramatic scene. Ethel duly flicked the switch and, lo and behold, a lamp on the opposite side of the set went on. This provoked a gale of laughter which utterly destroyed the tension, leaving Ethel to exercise all her ingenuity to restore order.

After the play, an irate Taubie swept in and took me to task. My faltering excuses were cut short by a stream of invective that I had never before heard from the lips of a lady, and my career as a lighting technician was instantly short-circuited. I was relegated to general dogsbody for the
rest of the short run, but the Club committee subsequently asked me if I would like to handle the box office. I agreed with alacrity, found that I loved the job, and thus began my ticket-selling career.

I had also worked on Taubie's production of the well-known classic *Love on the Dole*, two years earlier. It was her first production for the East Rand Theatre Club and caused a tremendous stir. Taubie's ability to stretch her cast of enthusiastic amateurs beyond their natural limitations made for a powerful evening. Such was the word of mouth that people drove from Johannesburg to see it, and the demand for tickets was so heavy that we put on a number of extra performances.

On the strength of its success, Taubie decided that *Love on the Dole* should be seen in Johannesburg, and, taking the precaution of making a provisional booking at the Library Theatre, asked the cast whether they were willing to undertake the strain of two weeks travelling back and forth from Benoni, where they mostly lived and worked. They unanimously felt this was the chance of a lifetime.

The gamble paid off. The Johannesburg run was a success, and although I was only a humble backstage worker and the season was short, I loved that taste of being part of the Johannesburg theatre scene.

In 1969, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the East Rand Theatre Club, Taubie wrote a handsome tribute to the attitudes, policy, talent and work of the Club, which she ended with these words: 'I remember the hard
times we all had when I directed many of your earlier productions, but I also like to think that *Love on the Dole* came closer to artistic reality than anything else I have done in the theatre.' Praise indeed from the revered Mrs Kushlick.

With the advent of the Nationalist Government came the first announcement of the 'grand design' for racial separation, apartheid, which would crystallise with the 'homelands' policy of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, but which rapidly took root in a series of repressive laws designed to keep the black workforce off the streets of our cities other than in the interests of labour. Many years later, the theatre would play a not insubstantial role in heightening awareness of these cruel injustices and would help to break the restrictions on interracial contact.

But whatever the political and moral concerns of the country, life for middle-class whites carried on as before, and mine was no exception. I was in my second year of articles and would graduate with a B. Com. degree at the end of 1948. I well remember proudly presenting my degree certificate to Mr Abe Swersky in expectation of a salary raise, only to be told that my qualification was meaningless, it was experience I needed. Chastened, I returned to the daily slog and my six-pound-a-month pay packet, but there was much to cheer me in my leisure hours.

The big excitement in the entertainment world was the arrival of an American company in a production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein hit, *Oklahoma!* brought to His
Majesty's by ACT. This show, with choreography by Agnes De Mille, began a new and golden chapter in the development of the American musical. It ran at New York's St James Theatre for record 2248 performances and held the record as the world's longest-running musical for eighteen years until it was superseded by the Broadway run of *My Fair Lady* (2717 performances).

With its use of ballet turned to athletic, vigorous and dramatic account, and the dark undertones to its storyline, *Oklahoma!* was credited as the first musical to have true dramatic and literary merit, and when ACT announced its December opening, there was a concerted rush for tickets. I was extremely fortunate to get two first-night seats and to share in the ecstatic reception given to the show. Public enthusiasm resulted in a then unprecedented five-month run.

La Verne Burden starred as Laurey opposite Bob Lyon's Curly, and they made a handsome as well as a talented pair. During the run, La Verne met the tall, dark and handsome Ivan Berold, rapidly becoming one of Johannesburg's local matinee idols—more, it must be admitted, on the strength of his good looks than his limited talent. She remained here to marry him but, in time, their romance ended in divorce. In 1966 I saw her again in a show at the New York City Centre and went backstage, where she gave me a warm reception and introduced me to her and Ivan's two children.

La Verne was a gracious and gentle soul, schooled in
the disciplines of the American theatre. Imagine her astonishment, therefore, when during a performance on tour in what was then Rhodesia, a black waiter suddenly crossed the stage with a tray of drinks while she was alone on stage singing the lovely ballad, 'Out of My Dreams'. Further astonishment followed when, a few moments later, he reappeared from the opposite direction carrying the now empty tray!

My good fortune in obtaining *Oklahoma!* tickets was the fruit of my patience in doggedly queuing for shows. From the mid-Forties, John Connell, who was director of music for the Johannesburg City Council and the city's organist, had presented seasons of up to eight operas in repertory, for which I would queue on behalf of a group of Benoni opera enthusiasts. None of us had much money and had to sit in the cheap seats, which made it imperative to get there early. On the days that booking opened, I would get up at 4 a.m. to catch the first train and make certain of a place near the front of the queue.

Connell was a real hero of the arts, visionary, dedicated and determined, with little regard for budgetary considerations. How he ever got his massively complicated programmes onto the stage defies explanation, particularly since they were presented at the City Hall, which was devoid of all facilities: no wing space, virtually no backstage area, no lighting equipment. When one considers that, nowadays, the Performing Arts Councils, with all their resources mount just four or five opera productions
annually, and then only one at a time, the scale of Connell's ambition comes into perspective.

In 1941, African Theatres invited John Connell to abandon the City Hall and present his operas at the Empire. I went to a performance of *Tosca* during one of Connell’s Empire seasons. As all opera-goers know, *Tosca* ends with the tragic heroine jumping to her death. On this occasion, soprano Pauline Mander leapt from the battlements, the curtains closed to applause, and opened again very quickly for the curtain call. Lo and behold, there was Miss Mander, bouncing back into the air from her hidden, and obviously very well-sprung, mattress. It was a most unusual, not to mention hilarious, end to the evening.

It was not long, however, before Connell’s productions gave way to those of visiting overseas opera companies. Indeed, after his retirement in 1950, African Theatres imports of Italian companies reigned supreme between 1951 and 1956. Thereafter, opera was in the hands of the National Opera Association and the Operavereniging van Suid Afrika, until the formation of PACT in 1963.

The backbone of the opera companies of the Forties and Fifties comprised several talented South African singers, among them Dirk Lourens, Albina Bini, Harry Hambleton, Cecilia Wessels, May Cooper, Saline Koch, Isabel McClaren, Dawie Couzyn and Betsy de la Porte. Also, the remarkable Rose Alper (later Rose Magid) who, until her death at the age of ninety-four in August 1996, remained actively involved in the music scene in Natal.
From the musical point of view, the country was rich in international culture, a state of affairs that prevailed even through the Fifties and Sixties when, despite the stigma of apartheid, many leading musicians unlike actors were still willing to come here.

A major event in 1948 was the visit of Sir Thomas Beecham. Ranked with Toscanini as one of the great conductors of all time, he touched our local city orchestras with his genius. I was privileged to attend his concerts in both Johannesburg and Cape Town, and it was after the latter that he made a speech from the stage, praising impresario Alex Cherniavsky's persistence in spending twenty years persuading him to come here. 'A man who could get me to come here should be exhibited', said Beecham, and Cherniavsky, hitherto the unseen creator of great occasions, was brought on to the stage. Alex Cherniavsky was my idol and my role model in those years. Although I didn't yet have any idea how I would get to work in show business, I wanted desperately to follow in Alex's footsteps.

Forty-five years later, Leonard Schach produced and directed a show called, simply, *Beecham*. Written by the British partnership of Caryl Brahms and Ned Sherrin, it was a wonderfully witty and informative account of Sir Thomas, the man and the musician. The title role was played by Michael Atkinson, an English actor who came out here in 1966 and has remained to become South Africa's equivalent of a venerable actor-knight, the elder statesman of his
profession. Other musical highlights in 1948 included a concert tour by the sublime Italian baritone, Tito Gobbi. He would return several times to star in opera productions, notably *Tosca* in which he was world famous for his interpretation of the evil Scarpia. When he memorably sang the role opposite Maria Callas (not, alas, in this country) they created a legendary pairing.

Ballet, too, was growing in importance and quality, and it remains generally acknowledged that it has always flowered most profusely in Cape Town. The University of Cape Town University Ballet gave a season at His Majesty’s in 1948, in which we saw Reina Berman, Arnold Dover, Denise Schultz, Dudley Davies and Jeanette Ordman dance. All were to make a contribution to ballet overseas, with Dover winning recognition in England as a choreographer and Jeanette Ordman becoming the director of the Bat-Dor in Israel. She and I became friends and corresponded for many years.

Queuing for tickets for these and many other plays, musicals, operas, ballets and solo performers became a way of life for me until 1954 when, with the opening of Show Service, I played host to the queue instead of standing in it. Ticket desks existed in a variety of shops and department stores as well as at the theatres themselves, and I well recall queuing at Polliacks, C.T.C Bazaars, Paramount’s, Publix, the Carnival Novelty and Ward and Salmon. It is salutary that none of these stores, so much part of the fabric of South African daily life, exists today.
Local theatre in the first apartheid year saw the Reps production of *The Witch*, starring Berdine Grunewald and Johann Nell. Also, in the cast were Doreen Mantie, who went on to make a successful career in London, and a future chairman of the Reps, Sam Moss. Sam became a Mayor of Johannesburg and served on the boards of PACT and the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, remaining a source of strength and encouragement to the performing arts.

Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies returned to Johannesburg to direct *The Taming of the Shrew* which ran at the Library Theatre and at the beautiful old Opera House in Pretoria as part of the fund-raising programme for the Reps who had bought the stand in Braamfontein where they proposed to build their permanent home.

JODS produced *The Count of Luxembourg* and *Little Nellie Kelly*, both of which suffered from being mounted at the Technical College Hall, in Eloff Street near the old Park Station. For some years, until more theatres were built, several shows had to endure this inadequate venue, beside which the Library seemed positively welcoming and sophisticated! The mildly risqué British musical comedy star and cabaret entertainer, Frances Day, did a season at the Colosseum and, in startling contrast, Madam Sarah Sylvia and her overseas company presented a season of Yiddish Theatre at His Majesty’s in November. Although the South African Jewish community has never numbered much more than 120 000, it has always played a strong part in the performing arts, either actively or as regular and
enthusiastic audience members. In the first half of the century there were many Jews who, like my own parents and grandparents, had come here from Eastern Europe and who were more at home with Yiddish than English. Naturally, they loved the visits of the Yiddish theatre and the experience of seeing skilled professionals speaking their own language, with the consequence that these seasons were financially very successful. Sarah Sylvia’s 1948 company included Max Perlman and his wife Guita Galena. Max returned here many times, and I became involved with the presentation of several of his seasons.

As the curtain fell on 1948, I returned home from my second visit to *Oklahoma!* the theatrical high point of the year whose lavish vitality banished all the cares of the real world, reflecting that it had been a momentous year in which the destiny of the country remained a speculation, but the cultural life looked set to flourish.
CHAPTER FIVE
A SHOWER OF STARS

The phenomenal success of *Oklahoma!* encouraged African Theatres to continue importing large-scale American musicals. They kicked off with Irving Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun*, which had opened on Broadway in 1946 and run for 1,147 performances. It starred Bonita Primrose (a hit as Ado Annie in *Oklahoma!* for Oklahoma) as Annie Oakley, the hillbilly sharpshooter locked in rivalry and romance with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show crack-shot Frank Butler, played by Oklahoma's Bob Lyon. With its period Midwestern background and an exuberant score that included hits such as 'You Can't Get A Man With A Gun', the show couldn't miss– and didn’t.

Their next, staged in 1950, was the very different *Brigadoon*, a fey piece of whimsy with a score by Lerner and Loewe, who would do rather better with *My Fair Lady* a few years later. Starring two imported leads, Louise Boyd and Michael O'Dowd, who were never heard of again, the show was not a success, but did yield the evergreen standard, 'Almost Like Being in Love'. *Brigadoon* was the last production that Phil Levard directed for African Consolidated Theatres, and one would have wished him to exit on a more triumphant note after all the wonderful shows he had mounted for them over the years.
Although the major roles in these musicals tended to be cast with overseas performers, local artists were used in the chorus and in featured parts. Notable among them were Olive King and the lively soubrette, June Hern.

Throughout the Forties and Fifties, ACT filled their showplace theatres - the Empire, the Colosseum, the Plaza and His Majesty's, the Pretoria Opera House, Durban's Playhouse, the Cape Town Alhambra, and other venues in smaller cities - with lavish, star-studded blockbusters. During the early Forties, they had mounted several shows in association with JODS at the Standard, and The Desert Song at the Empire. A succession of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were presented, while pantomime, ballet, opera and concerts continued to be staged. The roster of international stars was breath-taking in its collective talent - in these years, among many others, we were visited by Sophie Tucker, Donald O'Connor, Stanley Holloway, opera stars Lauritz Melchior, Jussi Bjorling and Jan Peerce, violinists Jascha Heifetz and Mischa Elman, actors Sybil Thorndike and Ralph Richardson, as well as ballerinas Alicia Markova, Beryl Grey, South African-born Nadia Nerina and the undisputed queen of the ballet, Margot Fonteyn. Among the many pianists we heard were Benno Moiseiwitsch, Gina Bachauer, Alicia de la Rocha, and the mercurial Michelangeli.

The Spanish dance companies of Antonio and Luisillo enjoyed spectacular success and unleashed a dormant passion for their art which led to a flood of pupils for
teachers equipped to train them in it. This was not a passing fad, but something that remained popular and laid the ground for the country's own Spanish dance company led by a South African born dancer of Greek extraction named Mersyne Mavros, better known as Mercedes Molina. Mercedes toured Europe with Luisillo’s company before returning to make her career here and becoming, with her partner Enrique Segovia (born Geoffrey Niemann) a regular feature of the country's entertainment from 1957 onwards.

Publicity for African Consolidated Theatres was in the charge of Jimmy Mackenzie and was integral to the business of seducing audiences into the theatres. Jimmy was a genius in his field, a past master in the spreading of word-of-mouth publicity (the most effective form, even today). He would get the city council's permission to close Eloff Street to traffic when a visiting star arrived, and have the luminary transported in a cavalcade of flower-bedecked open cars from Park Station to the old Carlton Hotel. Fans lined the pavements to catch a glimpse of these artists, showering them with confetti and flowers as they glided past. Among those given this treatment were Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels, George Formby, Danny Kaye, Johnny Ray and Cliff Richard. Needless to say, during my pre-Show Service days, I was in the crowd whenever I could escape the confines of Tuffias and Swersky, Accountants, and I realised much later that I was absorbing the lessons to be learnt from watching Jimmy Mackenzie's techniques. Today's publicists would do well to look into his archives.
and see how it should be done.

But these were special events, lent excitement by the international fame of these people, and the high expectations they engendered. On home ground, our regular theatrical fare continued to be supplied by the local acting and musical fraternity. It would still be some time before we would see a fully-fledged professional theatre establishment, clearly separated from amateur companies, replacing the semi-professional mix to which we were accustomed.

Nineteen forty-nine was the year of my twenty-first birthday. I celebrated at a dinner-dance with friends at His Majesty's Roof Garden Restaurant, a most appropriate choice for somebody who was happiest in the vicinity of a theatre, and I felt wildly sophisticated—particularly when visiting dancers Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin walked in, sat down at the next table, and smiled in our direction.

But a more important twenty-first birthday, historically speaking, was that of the Johannesburg Repertory Players. To mark the occasion, the Reps invited Andre van Gyseghem (the creator of my childhood wonder, the Southern Africa Pageant) to direct a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, starring Leon Gluckman and Eugenie Heyns (later the wife of Pierre de Wet). In the decades during which I was associated with show business, I puzzled as to why Shakespeare seemed always the automatic choice when a company wanted to do something special. What people didn’t seem to realise is that the speaking of
Shakespeare's verse requires rather more than just a mellifluous voice or a grand delivery. The memorable productions reflect a profound understanding of the play, and an inner truth in performance conveyed through expertise and experience. There is no greater trap in the canon than *Romeo and Juliet*, which, in addition to these factors, must be carefully cast if its tale of teenage passion is to convince an audience.

Alas, this birthday production came a cropper. While I remember it well, Leon Gluckman understandably preferred to forget it, squirming with embarrassment whenever it was mentioned. The main problem was the lead casting. Lithe, handsome, and blessed with a good voice, Leon was nonetheless too old to convince as the youthful Romeo and knew it. He was further hampered by his co-star, the pretty Miss Heyns. She, too, was a mite too mature to persuade us that she was an innocent fourteen-year-old, and, although a fine actress in the Afrikaans theatre, she was struggling with English for the first time - and Shakespearean English at that.

The verse failed to take fire in the face of their combined awkwardness, while a supporting cast of amateurs milled helplessly around the large stages of the Wits University Great Hall and the Pretoria Opera House, indulging in histrionics. Only Miss Muriel Alexander, in the role of the nurse, emerged with credit. Whatever the distinguished and experienced Van Gyseghem had had in mind, he was unable to draw it from his company, and
what should have been a major event was an awful disappointment, except for magnificent sets and costumes by Len Grosset and Louis Jacobson respectively.

One of those small-part players in the production was Herbert Kretzmer, who settled in London and became the respected drama critic for the *Daily Express*, as well as a noted lyricist. He wrote the lyrics for Charles Aznavour's English recordings and the words for the hit musical *Les Miserables*. Herbert is just one of dozens of South Africans who have enriched the cultural scene of other countries, proving that foreign visitors who enriched ours here were part of a two-way traffic.

Taubie Kushlick starred as Elizabeth of Austria in Jean Cocteau's period drama, *The Eagle Has Two Heads*, opposite Leon Gluckman whose failure as Romeo did not affect the heavy demand for his services. Tall, green-eyed and tawny haired, the larger-than-life Taubie brought her usual energy and commitment to this role, created in Paris by the French star Edwige Feuillere and played on Broadway by Tallulah Bankhead. The production was at the Library Theatre and, at Taubie's request, I helped backstage.

A climactic scene in the play has Elizabeth warding off her impending death at the hands of an assassin by reaching for a revolver, hung prominently on the wall. One evening, unusually for me, I was eating a slice of cake in the prompt corner rather than watching the scene when Taubie's outstretched hand suddenly appeared on the edge
Percy Tucker

of the wings, and a terrifying hiss came out of the corner of her mouth in my direction. I looked up, startled, and again she hissed at me. This time I heard the words: 'Give me the fork' and her beringed talons stretched for my plate. My fork was gone and Taubie swept back to the centre of the stage. I will never forget the look on Lean's face when she defended herself from his attack with a small cake fork.

This was not some sudden demented whim on Taubie's part, but the result of the prop man's failure to set the gun in its place. I offered up a silent prayer of thanks that I wasn't the person responsible for this dereliction of duty.

The improvisation was typical of this larger-than-life woman, who never allowed herself to be the victim of circumstance. As the scale of her achievements grew ever more impressive, so her imperiousness and egomania increased, and nobody who worked with her is without a tale to tell. I can't think of anyone else who could have got away with some of the more outrageous demands she made or unpleasant things she said, but the force of her personality and her inviolable confidence in herself made her almost irresistible.

I worked with Taubie, in one capacity or another, on virtually every one of her productions, professional and amateur, from the 1940s until her death in March 1991. Her husband, Dr Philip Kushlick, was a model of tolerance and devotion. An eminent paediatrician who specialised in cerebral palsy cases and did sterling work for
underprivileged black children, he would escort Taubie to her East Rand Theatre Club rehearsals in the Benoni Town Hall. Since she thought nothing of working until two or three in the morning, 'Darling Kushy', as she always called him, would try and grab some sleep on the unbelievably hard wooden chairs of the hall.

I, of course, revelled in my proximity to such an astounding theatrical personality. She used to reminisce to me about her days as a student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, where her teachers didn’t take long to recognise the force of her presence. Accordingly, she was given a one-line part in a production with the senior students. When her great moment came, she was so entranced by the famous figures in the front row, who included John Masefield and Hilaire Belloc, that she failed to hear her cue and missed her line. This must have had a profound effect on her, for I can’t remember a time when she was ever again lost for words.

Interestingly Taubie, who was born on a farm in Luckhoff in the Free State, spoke only Afrikaans until she was eight, when the family moved to Port Elizabeth. She insisted that she owed her extraordinary vocal powers to having spent hours declaiming over the noise of a rushing water cistern - not, fortunately, a technique she inflicted on her many drama students whom she schooled in the more conventional rigours of breath control and rib reserve. According to her, she took part in a concert at the age of nine for which she chose to recite 'The Wandering Jew', one
of the longest poems ever written. At the penultimate stanza, she suffered a memory blank, acknowledged the fact to the audience, and said, 'Never mind, I shall begin again'. Well- it's a good story!

During the late Forties, one of my duties as an articled clerk was to do the weekly audit at the old Orange Grove Hotel in Louis Botha Avenue. It became a favourite task because I sat at a table at the back of the ballroom where Eve Boswell rehearsed with Roy Martin and his Orchestra. I whiled away many happy hours there, and my puzzled bosses never understood why the audit took me so long.

On a more elevated note, Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin danced Act II of *Giselle*, Act I of *Swan Lake* and Aurora's Wedding from *Sleeping Beauty*, supported by a corps de ballet drawn from the South African National Ballet and University of Cape Town companies, and this event was the most magical experience of 1949 for me. Although our local ballet companies were of a remarkably high standard, I had never before seen principals of quite this class, whose expertise was honed to a perfection that was revelatory. The moment the curtain went up at His Majesty's to reveal the ethereal Markova entwined in the sinuous arms of Dolin, both frozen in a silver-blue light, is imprinted on my memory as if it were yesterday.

Eleven years later, I had the pleasure and privilege of getting closer than the stalls to the world of the ballet when I handled the tour of a company that included Anton Dolin, John Gilpin, Belinda Wright and South Africa's To by Fine.
The hard work and discipline of these people was awesome. During the tour Dolin gave classes to aspiring dancers, and it was a joy to watch his enthusiasm and patience in imparting his skills to his eager young pupils.

But back to the theatre of the spoken word. While Taubie Kushlick held sway as the premier producer-director of the time, others were beginning to make a strong impression. Leon Gluckman, in the relatively short time since his debut student production of *Murder in the Cathedral*, was steadily climbing the ladder to directorial success, as well as becoming a sought-after leading man. Indeed, the year ended with Leon staging a revue at the Library called Xmas Box. His friend, Herbert Kretzmer, composed five of the songs, and the delightful result, with a company led by Marjorie Gordon and Johann Nell, was a popular and a critical success.

In Cape Town, a highly educated, erudite and gifted young man named Leonard Schach was making an impact on the cultural life of that city. In 1948 his production of *The Glass Menagerie* at the University of Cape Town's Little Theatre had been received with adulation. It was the South African premiere of Tennessee Williams' painful, wistful drama about broken dreams, and co-starred the formidable and influential Rosalie van der Gucht, head (and later Professor) of the University's Speech and Drama Department, and Rosemary Kirkcaldy. In 1949, during his stint as Acting Controller of the Little Theatre, Leonard
Schach was invited to direct the play for the National Theatre, with Anna Romain Hoffman as Amanda, the mother, and Nita Economides as her crippled daughter, Laura. Touring in tandem with Leontine Sagan's production of Molnar's *The Guardsman*, the production gave notice to the country at large of a major new directing talent.

While Johannesburg, the biggest, wealthiest and most bustling South African city, was the busy centre of the country's cultural life, the legitimate theatre was successfully finding its professional feet in the more tightly-knit, less populated confines of Cape Town. Schach would soon form his own fully professional company, the Cockpit Players (named for his monumentally successful staging of Bridget Boland's *Cockpit* at the Little Theatre in 1949), who would make their home at the ill-equipped Hofmeyr Theatre in the bowels of the Groote Kerk building in Adderley Street. Meanwhile, the Hofmeyr was occupied by the Brian Brooke Company. Actor-manager Brooke, a man of immense charm, urbanity and good looks, had sought a theatrical career in England before the war, learning his trade in a variety of provincial theatres, sometimes as a song-and-dance man. He had met and married Petrina Fry, the gifted actress daughter of the well-known actor Reginald Fry, had served as an officer in the British army in World War 11, and had come back to South Africa in 1946 determined against the odds (of which there were many) to establish a fully professional company along British lines.
In the face of a huge struggle to make ends meet, he and Petrina initially mounted plays at extraordinary places such as the old Muizenberg Pavilion. They faced the threat of bankruptcy more than once but soldiered on to create a repertory theatre which was a highlight of Cape Town's cultural life, and of which Johannesburg had no equivalent.

In those days, Cape Town might as well have been on Mars for all the idea Johannesburg audiences had about the activity there. At the end of 1948, the Brooke Company had enjoyed such a startling success with their Cape Town production of Noel Coward's *Present Laughter*, which had run for an unprecedented six weeks, that African Consolidated Theatres invited them to present a season of three plays on their touring circuit. The hitherto unknown company opened at His Majesty's with *Present Laughter*, directed by John Roberts and starring Brian, Petrina and Cynthia Klette. They also brought *No Room at the Inn*, directed by Brian with Petrina starring, and *The Heiress*. This last, a play in which Petrina Fry had scored her greatest triumph as the plain heiress courted for her money by a charming ne'er-do-well, was directed by Leonard Schach, and had already enjoyed acclaim in Cape Town.

The advent of the Brian Brooke Company was a milestone in the development of South Africa's professional companies. Within a few years, Brian would build his own theatre in Johannesburg and give the city's public twenty-five years of high-gloss commercial theatre. As I sat in the audience at His Majesty's, enjoying his season of plays, I
certainly didn't foresee what a major role he and Leonard Schach would come to play in my own destiny, together with Leon Gluckman, whom I met and worked with towards the end of that same year, when he first directed for the East Rand Theatre Club.

In fact, the event that absorbed my attention as the decade ended was the visit of the Australian cricket team under the captaincy of Lindsay Hassett. From 24 December I spent four days at the old Wanderers ground watching the Aussies clobber Dudley Nourse's Springboks in the first test which we lost by an innings and eighty-five runs. We also lost three of the remaining four (and drew one). It was all very exciting, if a little dampening, but a new decade was dawning and there would be more sport than I dreamed of in the year to come.
Leon Gluckman had travelled extensively after obtaining his MA in Literature at Rhodes University and directing *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1948. He attended training courses at England's Old Vic School, and at Yale University, the Hollywood Actors Laboratory and the Pasadena Playhouse in the States. Now, in 1950, he took up an invitation from Andre van Gyseghem to work at England's prestigious Nottingham Playhouse, a two-year stint which gave him invaluable experience as both director and actor.

It was the beginning of several peripatetic years, during which Leon took two 'final' decisions: to settle permanently in South Africa and devote himself to the development of local theatre, particularly that of black theatre; and to leave the country permanently. The first decision was taken in 1957, but it was the second, in 1964, that stuck.

Meanwhile, back home the National Theatre appointed Marda Vanne as their artistic advisor, a decision which led to a high-grade production of *Macbeth* in Afrikaans, directed by Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies at His Majesty's with Andre Huguenet and Anna Neethling-Pohl, Shaw's *Candida*, directed by Miss Vanne herself, and a production of James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan*. 
This last, an ambitious abstract poetic evocation of the Golden Road to Samarkand, was directed by the now ageing Basil Dean, a feared autocrat of the British theatre who had been responsible for mounting Noel Coward's wartime spectacle, *Cavalcade*, at Drury Lane. Despite Dean's expertise and the charisma of Huguenet, the play was a disaster which repeated its failure in England, where André once again starred as the peasant poet. Even I, who tended to enthuse about most things, found it heavy weather when the novelty wore off after the first half-hour.

Brian Brooke returned to His Majesty's with another season of three plays. The first, *Edward, My Son*, successful in the Cape, was poorly received in Johannesburg and closed after five days, but the scintillating and sophisticated *Traveller's Joy* brought praise. The unqualified hit of the season, however, was the last-minute replacement for the ill-fated *Edward*, Philip King's tried and trusted English farce, *See How They Run*. The feared critic of *The Star*, Oliver Walker, headlined his rave, 'Farce With 1001 Laughs Rocks His Majesty's', and success was assured.

I must have seen at least twenty productions of this comedy classic in my life. Whenever the East Rand Theatre Club was in trouble, somebody would suggest a revival of *See How They Run*. In 1955, the Club staged a successful production by Bladon Peake who directed some fourteen plays for us in as many years. Bladon had come out from Britain to make the film *Hans die Skipper* for African Films and remained with them for many years. Originally a
theatre man, he could always be relied upon by the East Rand Theatre Club.

The Reps supplied their usual half-dozen plays, which included two productions by Taubie Kushlick, T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome* which saw Sheila Osrin as the temptress with the seven veils. In the climate of those times she was unable to reveal her full feminine pulchritude, but it's hard to imagine how anybody dreamed up the wearing of a pair of men's winter long johns in the interests of decency. This bizarre costume resulted in the hapless Miss Osrin being virtually ignored during the famous dance while we, the audience, were transfixed by the wrinkling Viyella round her ankles.

Sarah Sylvia presented another season of Yiddish plays at His Majesty's; Children's Theatre staged James Ambrose Brown's Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure at the Wits Great Hall; the ever-adventurous Miss Elizabeth Renfield appeared as the sad and slatternly Lola in William Inge's *Come Back, Little Sheba*, and JODS were back at the Technical College with *Lilac Domino* and Noël Coward's *Bitter Sweet*.

At the Colosseum, audiences enjoyed the rubber-faced British entertainer Florence Desmond, the Irish songstress Anne Shelton, and the mountainous 'Two-ton' Tessie O'Shea, as well as home-grown crooner Eve Boswell, who had made a name for herself overseas. Eve was the daughter of the immigrant Hungarian showman Hugo Keleti, who had become South Africa's most prominent
theatrical agent. And on the classical concert stage we were entranced by pianists Eileen Joyce and Jose Iturbi.

Iturbi, the Mexican-American pianist and conductor, was a virtuoso showman who had become popularly famous through his appearances in such Hollywood films as Anchors Aweigh, and A Song to Remember for which he also dubbed the piano playing of Cornel Wilde's Frederic Chopin. I had the thrill of meeting him in unexpected and unusual circumstances, at the training gym of his fellow Mexican-American, the prize fighter Manuel Ortiz who was in South Africa to fight Vic Toweel for the World Bantamweight Title. The Toweels were the country's most prominent boxing family- Benonians to boot- and the quiet, dignified Vic was the first South African to capture a world championship title. I stood in a very different type of queue to book for the fight, and on 31 May 1950 I joined twenty-thousand other yelling fans at Wembley Stadium for one of the most exciting nights of my young life.

The fight lasted its full forty-five minutes, during which our local hero appeared to be struggling through the first few rounds. Despair. He came back strongly in the last rounds. Joy. The fight ended, and Toweel was declared the winner. Pandemonium! I saw Vic Toweel fight twice more, defending his title first against Spain's Luis Romero, a dangerous southpaw, in 1951, then, on 15 November 1952 against Australia's Jimmy Carruthers who took a mere two minutes and nineteen seconds to knock him out. The South African boxing fraternity - and the whole of Benoni- went
into mourning. I drove past the Toweel house the next day. It was dark and deserted, a monument to disappointment, and marked the beginning of the end for Vic.

I later realised that my meeting with Iturbi, a daily visitor to the ringside, was not, after all, so strange. Sport and show business, my twin passions, have a lot in common: stars, an artificial setting, drama and conflict, entertainment, the glamour of success, the bitterness of failure.

The Fifties ushered in the age of commercial radio. Springbok Radio began broadcasting in the autumn of 1950 and engulfed the nation. I listened religiously to serials when I was supposedly studying for my final accountancy exams, and, like everybody else, became an avid fan of the soap-operas that filled the airwaves, laying the ground here — as they had in America— for the age of the TV soap which brought us *Dallas* and Dynasty. Springbok made many broadcasting personalities into household names: Bob Courtney, Eric Egan, Duggie Laws, Clark McKay, Johnny Walker, Michael Jackson and Esmé Euvrard, to name a few. And, significantly for the health of the theatrical profession, the slew of radio plays gave employment to many actors and brought their names to the attention of a much wider public. Some of the best known of these were Stuart Brown, Bruce Anderson, Marjorie Cordon, Simon Swindell, Hilda Kriseman and Cordon Mulholland.

But 1950 was a year when sport loomed large in my life. I had seen the fourth cricket test against the Australians and
enjoyed several tennis matches, when my brother Sammy was selected for the South African soccer team to compete in the first Maccabi games in September. During the family discussion of this event, I mentioned that I was due for leave in September and voiced the thought that it would be wonderful to go to the Games. This intelligence was lost in the hubbub, but when I said how wonderful it would be to visit Israel and have an opportunity to meet my father's brother Berl, I evidently struck a chord in my father, who gave me his blessing and paid for my air ticket.

My first trip out of South Africa began on an unpressurised Universal Airlines DC-6B in company with the entire Maccabi Team, a crowd of energetic guys and girls bursting with elation, who celebrated by drinking more than most of them had consumed in a lifetime.

Uncle Berl and his wife, my aunt Rose, met us at Tel Aviv's Lod airport. Berl's resemblance to my father was uncanny, he was almost a replica. He had been working in the Far East at the time of the Japanese invasion and had been taken prisoner. He survived unimaginable horrors and was left deaf from the brutal treatment he'd received. Rose had arrived in Israel as an illegal immigrant, having jumped ship from one of the boats carrying refugees whom the British refused to allow to dock. (Their experiences were vividly depicted in Leon Uris' *Exodus*). After wandering around for two days without food or shelter, Rose miraculously came upon her Hebrew teacher from Lithuania and was taken in by his family until she met and
married Berl in 1948. Sammy had stayed with them during his off-duty periods from the Israeli Air Force during the War of Independence, but for me this was a first, very emotional, meeting.

I soon learnt that the ambitions of the infant State of Israel were not yet matched by the country’s facilities. The opening ceremony was due to commence at 5 p.m. to avoid the intense heat of the day, and I set off at eleven in the morning to catch a bus to the Ramat Gan stadium, the hastily assembled and still incomplete venue some distance outside the city. The crowds at the bus stop were enormous, the atmosphere one of electric excitement which combined with voluble chaos as we eventually learned that the even larger crowds assembling outside the stadium were blocking the return of buses to pick up the next waiting load.

Finally, a group of other English-speaking tourists decided that the most reliable way to reach the stadium would be to walk. We traipsed the twelve kilometres in the burning Middle Eastern heat, arriving five hours later just in time to hear Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's opening address. As I sat there, caught up in the significance of the moment, I would never have believed it if anyone had told me that, within a few years, I would handle the bookings for the great man's public appearances and meet him during his official visits to South Africa. Although the fascination of being there never palled, it must be admitted that the Games themselves were something of a disappointment.
The inadequacy of the sports grounds naturally affected the standard of performance. Sammy and his soccer team did very well, and the South Africans in general picked up a respectable number of medals in various sports, but other than the records set in swimming and athletics by the Americans, little was memorable. I was always an ardent soccer fan, and when I returned home from the Games, I continued my practice of spending Saturday afternoons following the Benoni team and watching with trepidation as Sammy went into action as full-back against teams such as Balfour Park and Rangers. How my finger nails suffered through those afternoons of alternate agony and ecstasy! When I see the tense managers of soccer clubs on TV, I understand what they're going through.

The year ended with African Theatres' usual Christmas pantomime, this time a lavish and magical Cinderella with the famous British comedian Tommy Trinder as its star. This was at His Majesty's which, in 1951, was a hive of theatrical activity. Taubie Kushlick directed André Huguenet in the classical Greek tragedy Oedipus Rex, an earnest and serious undertaking, but it was the third visit of the Brian Brooke Company which played to capacity crowds. Tennessee Williams' steamy drama, A Streetcar Named Desire starred Betty Ann Davies and William Sylvester, imported from the West End along with the original Broadway set designs (replicated and improved upon by Roy Cooke). If their performances as Blanche Dubois and Stanley Kowalski weren't quite as compelling
as those of Vivien Leigh and Marlon Brando, they were nonetheless superb and rightly acclaimed for their work. According to Brian Brooke, however, these two top British actors were given to childish and erratic behaviour, playing onstage pranks like nailing each other’s props to the floor, or taking one another by surprise by substituting a silly toy for something specified by the playwright for its symbolic meaning. Fortunately, however, audiences remained blissfully unaware of this, and were enrapt at this dark, and, in those days, daring, drama set in the Deep South.

The Brooke production of R.F. Delderfield’s English comedy, *Worm’s Eye View*, was a mega-hit, and audiences both in Johannesburg and Cape Town couldn’t get enough of it. One memorable evening at His Majesty’s, Brian Brooke, in a moment of mad inspiration, created a farcical situation with a jelly and a fellow actor’s foot which turned the scene into the longest continuous laugh—three minutes plus—in South African theatre history. It was retained for the rest of the run.

Other highlights of the theatrical year in 1951 included a production for the University Players of Christopher Fry’s *The Lady’s Not For Burning* with Margaret Inglis, Molly Seftel, and Philip Birkin Shaw, a university English lecturer and always a welcome addition to the public stage. The Festival Ballet gave a programme of dance, the piano duo of Rawicz and Landauer came, the famous American-Jewish actor Meier Tzelniker played Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, and the great German soprano Elisabeth
Percy Tucker

Schwarzkopf gave a recital tour.

Because of rumours that Schwarzkopf had had Nazi affiliations during the war years, the concert promoters had to get clearance from the 51 Jewish Board of Deputies for this tour. The Board considered the charges groundless and we were able to hear one of the greatest singers of the century.

Children's Theatre presented Richard of Bordeaux at the Wits Great Hall. It marked something of a departure for them in that Gordon Daviot's play about Richard II is an adult piece, but it was a Matric setwork that year and the company hoped to capitalise on this. Directed by Minna Millsten with impressive sets by her husband Basil Warner (who would earn recognition some years later as the author of Try for White), and starring the handsome John Rutherford as the ill-fated king, it was an ambitious undertaking that fell prey to public indifference and a lack of attendance by the schools for whom it was intended. Thereafter, Children's Theatre confined themselves to traditional juvenile fare.

Historically, the year's major event was the opening on 7 November 1951 of the new Reps Theatre. Designed by Manfred Hermer and situated in Stiemens Street, Braamfontein, this was Johannesburg's first intimate (510 seats), custom-built theatre for the presentation of legitimate plays since the old Standard had been erected. Naturally, I had gone to great lengths to secure tickets for this glittering event, at which the red carpet was literally
rolled out to receive the dignitaries and celebrities, headed by the Governor-General, Dr E.G. Jansen. Percy Baneshik wrote an ode to the Reps, which was read from the stage by the august Muriel Alexander before the curtain went up on the inaugural production, *Much Ado About Nothing*, with Margaret Inglis and Jack Ralphs as Beatrice and Benedick, under the peerless direction of Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies.

In the event, I had to content myself with reading the press reports and the souvenir programme, because the event was eclipsed by the sad loss of my grandparents. On 2 November, five days before the Reps opening, my grandfather Mannie Goldstein died at the age of seventy-seven. This was my first encounter with death and, although I found it very sobering, grief was dulled by the fact that Grandpa Mannie had been ill for some time, and despite the fact that I spent time with him regularly every week, his lack of English had prevented us from growing really close.

Grandpa Mannie was buried on 3 November, with Grandma Malka and his four children as chief mourners. Malka took to her bed, listless and refusing to eat- a condition my mother put down to her emotional state at losing her husband. On 6 November, three days after Mannie’s funeral, the phone shrilled through our house in Prince’s Avenue at one in the morning. It was my aunt Edie to say that Malka had died quietly and without visible cause. It seemed that she quite simply couldn’t live without her husband.
Three days later, our shock and incomprehension shared by the whole Benoni Jewish community, we were back at the cemetery. This time, I learnt the real meaning of grief at the loss of a loved one. Granny Malka was a traditional nineteenth-century Jewish wife and mother who attended to her familial duties devotedly and without complaint. She was also sweet-natured and compassionate and, as the youngest of her three Tucker grandsons, I was the favourite - as indicated by the half-crown she gave me every Saturday. I loved her very much and had the double sadness and bewilderment of witnessing my mother’s grief. All of which made me reluctant to go on a trip to Europe which had been planned a few months earlier. To this day I bless my parents for insisting that I stick to my arrangements, for this tour was, and remains, one of the richest experiences of my entire life, and a major contributing factor to my professional future.
By 1951 I was already a great admirer of Leonard Schach's work. In the autumn of that year I saw an advertisement inviting theatre enthusiasts to join an overseas tour under the guidance of the Cape Town director. The tour was to include visits to the famous theatres, opera houses and concert halls of Britain and Europe, and would last for three months. At an all-in price of three-hundred-and eighty-five pounds this was an opportunity not to be missed and, since my period of articles with Tuffias and Swersky was ending that year, leaving me jobless, I decided to go. To pay for it, I raided my savings, which included the gifts of money saved from my Barmitzvah. I caught the boat train for Cape Town in a state of excited anticipation. Fourteen eager travellers were met by Leonard Schach in Cape Town, where, on 8 December 1951, we boarded the Edinburgh Castle for Southampton. I was assigned to share quarters with a young man named Robert Mohr, later to become the Professor of Drama at the University of Cape Town. Also, on board, though not part of our group, was a precocious seventeen-year-old Capetonian named Ronnie Horwitz, who would mature into the internationally recognised dramatist and screenwriter, Ronald Harwood.
A lifetime of valued friendship with Leonard began during this voyage. His knowledge of all aspects of the performing arts was awesome, his ability to communicate it (and his telling criticisms of the mediocre) inspirational. He proved a witty and stimulating companion, and a patient guide and teacher. Every mealtime was a pleasure, with his fourteen acolytes, wide-eyed regardless of age, soaking up what he had to say and plying him with questions. Once we were on dry land, enjoying the riches for which he had prepared us, there was even more to talk about. I must have bored him to death at times with my naivety and talk of my own ambitions, but he was always encouraging, and the burgeoning of my theatrical education under his tutelage was immeasurable.

After disembarking into the heart of an English winter, itself a shock to the system, we left for Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford-on-Avon. We did the usual tourist round, then went to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre to see John Gielgud, Diana Wynyard and Paul Scofield in Gielgud's production, bursting with gaiety, of *Much Ado About Nothing*. To see and hear Shakespeare staged and spoken at the highest level was the first of many eye-openers on the trip. I soon realised that, back home, the few professionals such as André Huguenet, Gwen Ffrangcon Davies, Siegfried Mynhardt and Margaret Inglis, were too often let down by the worthy but inadequate amateurs who filled the lesser roles, as well as by sub-standard venues.

Still under the spell of Shakespeare and on a high from
the post-show discussions with Leonard which made me feel as though I had entered the rarefied realms of the intellectual elite, we hot-footed it to Bristol, the West of England’s historic seaport and home of the Bristol Old Vic and its theatre school. The purpose of our visit, however, was to enjoy a traditional English pantomime in a traditional English setting. It was a very merry and decidedly unintellectual outing, much simpler and cosier than the glamorous pantos at His Majesty’s. The next stop was London, but although I had dreamed of my first visit to this mecca of English-speaking culture and could hardly wait to get there, my passion for sport led to my voluntarily delaying the moment. I detached myself from the group and caught a train to Cardiff, where I watched the Springboks play Wales at rugby and heard the Welsh choirs in concert. It was an intoxicating afternoon which lightened the lone journey to London.

After that there was no let-up in a crowded schedule that called on reserves of energy we didn’t know we had. Life became a continuous kaleidoscope of heightened experiences, turning us from keen theatregoers into a band of knowledgeable people. Leonard was the South African representative of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), and this was the first ever theatre tour under their auspices. In every city we visited somebody from the ITI was on hand to meet us and, since Leonard convinced us that our knowledge of the theatre in all its forms would be incomplete without a thorough look at the mechanics, we
saw theatre buildings from inside and out, backstage and front, inspecting everything from the toilet facilities to the flies.

This close-quarter viewing of everything that's usually hidden from the public took place, of course, on either side of the performances we attended in these buildings. The first of these was South Pacific, starring Broadway's Mary Martin. Afterwards, Leonard escorted us backstage for a dressing-room introduction to the great Miss Martin, the first of many such encounters with the famous that added a fairy tale dimension to the trip. Mary Martin introduced us to two young men from the chorus who were in her dressing room. They were her son Larry Hagman, later the gloriously infamous J.R. of Dallas, and a Scotsman named Sean Connery. We saw John Gielgud, Diana Wynyard and Flora Robson in A Winter's Tale, and Flora, who was a friend of Leonard's, organised a party for us at the Arts Theatre.

Among many other great figures of the theatre to whom we were introduced were Robert Morley, future actor-knights Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and Alec Guinness, future Dames of the British Empire Peggy Ashcroft, Edith Evans and Wendy Hiller (whom we all remembered as Eliza Doolittle in the film of Pygmalion); and, from the world of dance, Margot Fonteyn and the familiar figure of Alicia Markova. I felt as though I were living in a fantasy and walking on winged feet- which was just as well, since we didn't stop running from first thing in
the morning till midnight.

On 31 December we went to Amsterdam for the traditional New Year's Eve performance of the Dutch play, *Die Gysbecht van Amstel*. This tested our endurance to the limits. Not only was it our first encounter with a play in a foreign language (albeit one that had a distant cousin in Afrikaans), but it was a piece that, together with the light operetta and *Prayer for the Queen* which followed it, lasted for five-and-a-half hours! On 1 January 1952, the tercentenary of Jan van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape, we visited his birthplace at Culemborg. As the first South Africans there on this anniversary, we received a splendid welcome from the Mayor and citizens of the town.

From Holland we crossed to Belgium to be entertained, on stage and off, by the Belgian National Theatre in Brussels, attending a play in Flemish, another cousin to Afrikaans, before travelling to Paris, the most seductive of cities even in the midst of a grey and freezing European winter. There we saw the aristocrats of the French classical theatre, Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud, in Marivaux's *Les Fausses Confidences* (*False Confidences*) at the *Comédie Francaise*. Since my French consisted of no more than 'Bonjour' and 'Merci', following this classic play was quite arduous, but I also made the satisfying discovery that truly great acting in a play of universal emotions transcends the language barrier, although one inevitably misses the subtleties that are rooted in the language itself. I found myself responding to the exquisite cadences of
perfectly declaimed French as if to music.

We took a trip to Versailles and were guided round Marie Antoinette's private theatre and saw both opera and ballet at the Paris Opera House. The building itself was worth the price of admission, a grand Second Empire architectural symphony in marble, with sweeping staircases and chandeliers that had to be seen to be believed. The foyer was even more spectacular than that of the Covent Garden Opera House, though the red plush of Covent Garden is warmer and less intimidating.

It was at the Paris Opera that my trusting naivety led to a serendipitous encounter with the brilliant dancer and choreographer Gene Kelly, star of many a marvellous Hollywood musical. He was in Europe to promote *An American in Paris* and, during the interval of the ballet, I found myself standing next to him at the bar. Never at a loss for words, I initiated a conversation. He was warm and unaffected in his response, but I think the fact that I was a South African (something akin to a Martian in Hollywood in those days!) intrigued him, and that I was part of an official theatre tour gave me some credibility.

The upshot of this was that he asked me if I would like to meet Serge Lifar, the director of the Paris Opera Ballet. Then possibly the last surviving member of the legendary Diaghilev company, Lifar was also dancing that night, and though well past his prime, still had a god-like aura, striking, virile and Russian.

Naturally, I jumped at Kelly's invitation and, much to
the irritation of Leonard and the envy of my travelling companions, I was escorted to the star dressing-room, an opulent affair befitting a legend, where I spent a mesmerising half-hour listening to these two giants of the dance, products of differing eras and disciplines, discussing the finer points of their art.

I still treasure the image of Kelly, a jaunty *Singin' in the Rain* style hat perched on his (toupee'd) head, waving an affable goodbye as he bounced back to his hotel. I never saw him again, except on the screen of course. Clive Hirschhorn, another South African and lifelong friend of mine, who found his niche as a prominent show business journalist and critic in London, wrote the authorised biography of Gene Kelly, who died in 1996 at the age of eighty-three.

We left Paris for Vienna, the baroque seat of the old Hapsburg Empire, where we were willingly force-fed a diet of culture that included productions in German of Cyrano de Bergerac and the play version of Figaro on which the opera is based. The grand opera house, where South Africa's Mimi Coertse would soon be a resident attraction, was still under reconstruction, but we were given a tour of the stage.

Our Sunday in Vienna was typical of the pace we maintained throughout the trip: Before breakfast attend a mass in the Hofburg Chapel where the Vienna Boys' Choir sang the choral sections of the service; breakfast in the Prater, then on to the Musiekevereinsaal to hear the morning
concert by the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Wilhelm Furtwangler. Extraordinarily, there was a one-hour interval during the concert and in that hour, Leonard bundled us into taxis which sped us off for a quick taste of the Brueghel collection at the Kunsthistorische Museum. This turned out to be a slightly misguided expedition as we arrived back at the concert hall a few minutes late · find the doors locked. After much argument and gesticulation, the commissionaire allowed us back just in time to catch the final item, Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

The morning’s activities proved a mere hors d'oeuvre to lunch in a restaurant in the Vienna Woods, an afternoon performance of part one of Goethe’s Faust, a quick snack at a nearby coffee shop, and the evening performance of part two of the play. The fact that we had squeezed more into a day than many people would manage in several didn't deter us from an animated late-night discussion of the day’s events when we returned to the hotel.

After Vienna, our buzzing brains and imaginations were given a few days respite in the snow at Kitzbuhl. We got on to skis for the first time and, in my case the last, although I enjoyed the experience and managed the nursery slopes with only a minor tumble. From there, we briefly toured Salzburg, where I was knocked out by the architectural beauty of Mozart's birthplace, and stopped off for twenty-four hours in Zurich en route to Germany. Germany, where we visited Hamburg, Munich and Berlin, was a profoundly eerie and sobering experience. These
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cities, their landscapes still composed of ruins and rubble seven years after the surrender, brought home to us the devastation wrought by the war. The bleak and terrible destruction was emphasised by the few handsome buildings which had somehow escaped the Allied bombs. Strangely (and wonderfully) these included theatres and opera houses.

The first show we saw in Germany was an operetta, *The Tsarevitch*, enjoyable in a syrupy, cream-cake kind of way, but the explicit purpose of our stay was to see a revival of the late Max Reinhardt's incomparable production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (he had directed the Hollywood film version with James Cagney and Mickey Rooney among the cast), and to meet Bertolt Brecht and watch him at work with the Berliner Ensemble at the Deutsches Teater in East Berlin.

The Berlin Wall had not yet been built and reaching the Deutsches Teater on the Unter den Linden was a simple matter of catching an underground train from the Western sector and changing our currency in the East. We were fortunate to see Brecht's production of one of his most famous plays, *Mother Courage*, starring his actress wife, the commanding Helene Weigel. It was the most striking and powerful evening of theatre in my life to that date and remains a unique experience.

This epic play, first produced in the late Forties, focuses on the travails of a wandering female peddler, fighting adversity. and the loss of her children amidst the coarse
brutalities of the Thirty Years War. Staged with the utmost simplicity against a white cyclorama, the drama was enacted under a pitiless white light, the company totally lost in the world of the play's creation. I've rarely seen such integrated team work since, nor have many actresses matched the remarkable power of Weigel's performance.

The highly individual style which Brecht imposed on his company - broad, defiant and rhetorical - was deeply impressive, while the play itself, with its central theme of conflict between ideals and the reality of survival, carried unmistakable resonances of the recent war still so fresh in the European memory. The high emotional charge reduced the audience to tears and the final curtain brought only a stunned silence.

A few years before the Berlin Wall was torn down, I again visited Berlin and found the Deutsches Theatre presenting a season of plays by Athol Fugard.

Our German experience ended on a similarly profound note in the industrial town of Essen, seat of the mighty arms manufacturing empire which had serviced Hitler's war. The purpose of our journey was to meet choreographer Kurt Jooss, watch rehearsals for his renowned ballet, *The Green Table*, and attend a performance of the work. An aggressive piece of anti-war propaganda, *The Green Table* features a group of politicians arguing around a green table and leading their countries inexorably into war. The action then moves through scenes of war before returning to the table. As with Mother Courage, the sober message paralysed the
audience into silence. As it would have been inappropriate to follow this with anything less meaningful, Jooss told us that wherever it was performed it was always the last item on a mixed bill.

While crossing the channel from Calais to Dover en route back to England on 6 February 1952, the boat's captain broke the news that King George VI was dead and Princess Elizabeth would become Queen. With all theatres closed, we joined the crowds in the courtyard of St James's Palace to witness the ancient ceremony of The Proclamation of the Queen. I was fascinated by the colourful and stately heraldic traditions surrounding the death of the King and joined the queues at Westminster Hall to see the lying-in-state.

The King was buried at Windsor on 15 February, following the removal of the coffin from Westminster amidst great pomp and ceremony. I was, of course, there to watch the funeral procession, which was an extraordinary sight. Thousands of people lined the streets to witness their beloved monarch's last exit, accompanied by the Queen, the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret, all sombrely veiled - as was the Dowager Queen Mary, a regal and forbidding figure, too old to make the journey beyond Westminster. All the remaining crowned heads of Europe were there, and the most noble Dukes of England; heads of state from every nation attended, with the South African High Commissioner in the forefront of non-Royal representatives. With the gun-carriages, plumed horsemen
and dignitaries it was an impressive, intensely moving and, indeed, theatrical occasion, and I was very grateful for my six-foot-three inches of height which enabled me to see everything over the heads in front of me.

In total contrast to this solemn spectacle, I was a bystander at Caxton Hall when Elizabeth Taylor married Michael Wilding. When they emerged from the hall with their witnesses, Anna Neagle and her husband Herbert Wilcox, chaos broke out as they were mobbed by Miss Taylor's adoring fans, but I managed to catch a glimpse of the stunning violet-eyed beauty and take a photograph of her. That evening, a press photo of the event in the London Evening News showed me, camera poised, in the crowd. I met Elizabeth Taylor years later when she visited South Africa with Richard Burton and showed her the clipping. She was interested and amused and told me that wherever she went in the world, people would produce their own pieces of Taylor memorabilia for her inspection.

At the end of the tour, Leonard was to remain in England for a while to work, and I decided that I, too, would stay on for another month. I took leave of my travelling companions and, feeling wildly sophisticated and independent, checked into the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch. But not for long. With my limited and rapidly dwindling financial resources, I realised that I would be bankrupted by the nightly tariff of twenty-seven shillings, and soon found a bed and breakfast lodging in Sussex Gardens for three guineas a week. I struck up an interesting
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(strictly verbal) acquaintance with one of the locals, a hooker who continued to ply her trade although she had broken a leg and was limping around in a plaster cast. I never plucked up the courage to ask her how she did it.

I used every minute of my last month to experience the riches of London that had been hastily glimpsed or only cursorily explored during our initial stay. I returned to Westminster Abbey and St Paul's at leisure, and spent hour upon hour at the British Museum, fascinated by the Elgin Marbles, the Egyptian antiquities, and the ancient manuscripts in the library; I soaked up the magnificent paintings in the National Gallery, the Tate and other major collections; I spent weekends out of the city, losing myself in the maze at Hampton Court, or visiting Windsor Castle or boating on the Thames; I took a trip to the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, an imposingly beautiful Georgian city, and haunted the large West End cinemas, which frequently had a live show as a curtain-raiser to the film. Naturally, seeing *An American in Paris* gave me special pleasure as I watched the genius of my Paris 'friend', Gene Kelly.

I went to Manchester to see *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, Leonard Schach's first production in England. It was very well reviewed, and I glowed with pride on my mentor's behalf. Determined not to miss a thing, I went to see pre-West End tryouts out of town, among them Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*, starring a superlative Peggy Ashcroft and Kenneth More, and directed by Frith Banbury, a frequent visitor to South Africa. This modern English
classic about the death of a love affair is enthralling in its delineation of a woman in despair and is still often revived. I've seen it twice in South Africa as the opening offering at new theatres and was privileged to meet Rattigan later when he came to Johannesburg.

Michael Redgrave and Googie Withers were trying out in *Winter Journey* at the Oxford Playhouse, another marriage of a first-class play to brilliant acting. I took the opportunity that day to wander round the medieval college buildings that make up Oxford University- an amazing sight for one accustomed to the faceless modernity of Wits.

I enjoyed actor-playwright Peter Ustinov starring in his own *The Love of Four Colonels*, in which South Africa's Moira Lister co-starred. I went backstage and introduced myself to her in what would prove to be the first of many meetings. Indeed, I saw numerous artists with whom I would later meet or work in South Africa: Joyce Grenfell and Max Adrian in *Penny Plain*; the *Lyric Revue* with Joan Heal, Ian Carmichael and South African-born Graham Payn, Noel Coward's intimate companion and one of his biographers; England's most famous farceur, Brian Rix, who would star in *Reluctant Heroes* at Johannesburg's Academy Theatre in the Seventies; Joyce Redman, Vera Lynn, Jimmy Edwards ... The list is endless. I saw two pantomimes in the West End. *At the Casino*, a very youthful Julie Andrews played the princess in *Aladdin*; and at the Palladium, where an appearance marked the pinnacle of success for light entertainers, I saw the gap-toothed Terry-Thomas play the
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king in Humpty Dumpty. This gung-ho and very polished comedian was married to a Johannesburg girl, Ida Patlansky but, though a huge star of British stage and film for many years, Thomas ended up ill and destitute, living off charity in a bleak bed-sitter.

Among the outstanding dramatic highlights of the month were Richard Burton in Lillian Hellman's Montserrat, and Margaret Johnston as the sexually repressed spinster of Tennessee Williams' Summer and Smoke. Noel Willman, who would soon appear in South Africa, was in the cast with Burton, and William Sylvester, who had played in A Streetcar Named Desire for Brian Brooke, was Miss Johnston's co-star.

There were disappointments, too, among them the last musical written by Ivor Novella before his death. Called Gay's the Word - not a title to be lightly used nowadays - it starred the irrepressible Cicely Courtneidge as a retired musical comedy actress attempting to run a training academy for aspiring artistes. It was a far cry from Ivor's Ruritanian romances and, although entertaining enough, lacked the Novella magic.

Aside from theatre, cinema, art and architecture, there was music. The choice of concerts and opera was overwhelming, and even I couldn't manage it all. I did however, pay several return visits to the Royal Opera (where I was introduced to Berg's Wozzeck, Massenet's Werther and Richard Strauss' Salome as well as seeing some of the more familiar repertoire), and was in the ballet audience
whenever Margot Fonteyn or Moira Shearer danced. By contrast, the black American-born Katherine Dunham and her dance company throbbed with exotic vigour and excitement. The company's fusion of Negro slave dances, jazz, ragtime, ritual African dance, West Indian voodoo rites and South American ballet was a unique experience.

Then there were the great orchestras, the London Symphony and the London Philharmonic, which brought the added bonus of the Albert Hall (burnished Victorian) and the newly-built Festival Hall on the Thames (functional modern). And in the somewhat unusual surroundings of a gallery in the Victoria and Albert Museum, I heard Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten perform Schubert's *Die Schöne Mullerin*.

What with matinees and evening performances, I was in a theatre or concert hall eleven times a week, yet neither my energy nor my concentration and enthusiasm ever flagged. I saw virtually every production in the West End and learnt the importance of a theatre culture to a community, and the value of cultural traditions, which were still in their infancy back home. The lesson has stayed with me all my life and, as I reluctantly packed up to leave England, I was more determined than ever to find a way of involving myself more directly with the theatre. I was no longer content only to sweep the stage for the East Rand Theatre Club or to help out elsewhere on an occasional basis, but I still had no answer to the question of how I could fulfil my desire.
Meanwhile, I arrived home feeling slightly unreal, much more grown up, and stony broke. With a heavy heart but a practical mind, I found a job with Mendel Gutkin, Accountants, and went back to auditing.
Although happy to see my family again after so long a break, returning to Benoni and the old routine of commuting to an accountants' office was difficult. I felt restless, unsettled, and the nearest I've ever come to being dissatisfied with life. Theatregoing friends and acquaintances were quick to commiserate with me for having missed the first outside production at the new Reps Theatre, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

With what I felt to be my superior knowledge and experience, I initially dismissed this deprivation as unimportant, but my arrogance, fortunately, was short-lived, and I soon regretted not having seen the great American actor Jacob Ben-Ami as the tragic figure of Willy Loman, and Leon Gluckman (who co-directed with Ben-Ami for the Sarah Sylvia Company) as his son Biff. I decided that the answer to missing the excitements of London lay in re-involving myself with local theatre.

Unfortunately, my first visit to a show served forcibly to underscore the gulf in standards which I was perceiving for the first time. The JODS were presenting another revival of Romberg's *The Desert Song* at the Reps but, freed at last from the bleak ambience of the Technical College, gave a lumbering, underpowered and interminable evening. The
performance finished well past 11 p.m. and the critics left before the end to meet their deadlines.

London did, however, come to Johannesburg several times. The raucous, vivacious Ethel Revnel, a well-loved star of British music hall, appeared at His Majesty's, topping a variety bill from the Palladium. Best of all, the company included the Tiller Girls, famed for their perfect legs and incomparable clockwork precision. The evening was a replica of that at the London Palladium, and I had a wonderful time.

The variety show was followed by Britain's Wilson Barrett company. Having been away during the historic visit of the Old Vic Company, headed by Irene Worth and Paul Rogers in a season of Shakespeare, I eagerly booked for the American comedy Harvey, Shaw's *Saint Joan* and a stage adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. My new-found critical faculties were clearly working overtime since I found this solid, respectable company rather dull and old-fashioned.

Things perked up again when the Vienna Boys' Choir, whom I had so recently encountered in their home city, came on a tour, and African Theatres presented Nadia Nerina and Alexis Rassine in a ballet season. Their programme included Swan Lake, *Les Sylphides*, *Spectre de la Rose*, and the first act of *Giselle*. Rassine, another South African who had become internationally famous, brought a vivid brilliance to the 'Spectre'; Nerina, as always, displayed exquisite delicacy.
Also, at His Majesty's, the London stage and screen star Robert Flemyng played in *The Little Hut*, a frothy and absurd comedy about a wife whose favours are shared by her husband and her lover when all three are shipwrecked on a desert island. I had seen it in London and would see it again years later when Shirley Firth revived it at the Intimate Theatre. Robert Flemyng would one day return to star in Rattigan's *In Praise of Love* for Pieter Toerien and Shirley Firth, during the run of which we became firm friends.

Meanwhile, our own companies produced a handful of plays of which we could be proud. At the Reps I was privileged to see Leonard Schach's superb production of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* for the National Theatre. This outrageous satire about greed and deception is very difficult to pull off, but Leonard's inventiveness, innate taste and intellectual mastery of text created a lively and polished evening, executed by a cast that included Siegfried Mynhardt, Pieter Geldenhuys, Gerrit Wessels, Edna Jacobson, Frank Wise and Vivienne Drummond. It was ensemble playing of the highest order from actors who soon became major figures in South African theatre. The beautiful and talented Vivienne Drummond did well in England, where she played opposite Alan Bates in John Osborne's landmark play, *Look Back in Anger*, but ended up one of the sad casualties of her profession. She returned to this country where she gave some superb performances, but eventually ruined her career and destroyed her life with
drink.

In September 1952, Leonard directed Lorca's brooding, claustrophobic Spanish drama, *The House of Bernarda Alba* for the Reps, with a cast that included Muriel Alexander and two alumni of the East Rand Theatre Club, Molly Seftel and Mary Mitchell. Then, to celebrate the first birthday of their new theatre, the Reps got Leonard for *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. The play starred Haidee Cassell, a Cape Town broadcaster and theatre personality who was so desperate to play the part that she offered to pay all her own expenses. The Reps gratefully accepted but, unfortunately, neither Haidee nor the play found favour with Johannesburg critics or audiences.

These productions helped restore my wavering faith in local theatre, as did work enhanced by Leon Gluckman's skills, honed by his two years of experience at the Nottingham Playhouse. The son of Dr Henry Gluckman, the Health Minister in the Smuts cabinet, Leon was an intellectual, politically aware and disturbed by the injustices of apartheid, as well as obsessed with the theatre and achievement of the highest standards. He was blessed not only with a fine brain, but a commanding presence which set him apart from the common herd.

During 1952, Leon memorably directed and co-starred (opposite Margaret Inglis) in Giraudoux's *Amphitryon 38*; directed Lydia Lindeque and Vivienne Drummond in the rambunctious ancient Greek political comedy *Lysistrata*; acted in and directed *The Same Sky* with Sarah Sylvia, and,
for the Reps, directed Andre Huguenet in Moliere's *Tartuffe*. This was an impressive output by any standards, but Leon was a driven creature who would keep up this pace always.

Also, that year, Leon and Margaret Inglis co-directed and co-starred in a production of John Van Druten's comedy *The Voice of the Turtle*, which toured the East Rand. I was roped in as an assistant stage manager, and it only took the first dress rehearsal to know why I was needed. The action seemed to require Leon and Peggy to consume an inordinate number of meals and drinks on stage, and I was kept busy washing the dishes. But at least I was associated with my first fully professional theatre company, and my career was progressing - from sweeping stages to washing dishes! There was no way to go but up.

'Up', as it turned out, was the Arts and Culture Committee of the Benoni Publicity Association, who asked me to help organise their fourth annual arts festival, held in September. For so small a town, the programme was rather ambitious. The East Rand Theatre Club mounted a production of *The Happiest Days of Your Life*, and Leonard's NT production of Volpone came to the Town Hall. There were concerts by the Johannesburg City Orchestra conducted by Franco Ghione (formerly of La Scala in Milan), and by the German coloratura soprano, Ilse Hollweg; the Festival Ballet *brought Swan Lake*, and there were performances of Handel's 'Messiah'. I was involved with publicity, bookings, checking arrangements, and
making sure everything was in working order. I threw myself wholeheartedly into these activities and regarded my hours at Mendel Gutkin, Accountants as an unavoidable daily trial.

Although I was on the run from dawn till dusk and beyond, sport was not entirely neglected. In May 1952, Newcastle United, who had just won the English F.A. Cup for the second successive year, came on an extensive tour of South Africa. I joined Sammy and a bunch of our soccer-mad friends at the Rand Stadium on 17 May, when they defeated Southern Transvaal by three goals to two. It was a bad day for local pride, but an absolutely thrilling match.

It was in 1952 that Brian Brooke began his policy of periodically importing British guest artists to appear with his company. The first was the polished and avuncular star of stage and screen, Cecil Parker, a consummate exponent of deadpan English humour, and the play was *The White Sheep of the Family*. It concerns the comical disarray into which a family of professional crooks is thrown when the son of the household declares in favour of an honest living. Parker was a delight as the outraged paterfamilias, and this entertaining play was another Johannesburg triumph for Brooke, still on the visitor's list from Cape Town.

Taubie Kushlick's contribution to what in the end turned out to be a very good year was her production of an American play called *Pick-Up Girl*. It was, for its time, an outspoken, disturbing and controversial piece. Set in a New York juvenile court where a minor is being tried for
prostitution, the play posed a number of moral questions about the girl's situation, questioning how far society was responsible for her downfall. It caused consternation among the Mother Grundys of Johannesburg, and the newspapers had a field day, but Taubie revelled in the free publicity. Certainly, it was the frankest play I had ever seen although, by today's standards, it might seem rather tame. Marilyn Patterson, a suitably pretty and voluptuous young actress, played the title role in *Pick-Up Girl*, and Taubie found her leading man at a party. Colin Stamp was the managing director of American Express, well-known throughout the travel industry and through his radio talks on travel. He had never set foot on a stage, nor had any intention of doing so, but Taubie was undeterred. Within ten minutes of spotting him across a crowded room she had decided he was the right man for the role and persuaded him to agree with her.

While all these high-profile theatrical events were taking the limelight, the same Teda de Moor who founded the Black Dance Drama in 1942, had been quietly beavering away in her attempts to elevate black theatre, and had teamed up with George Makanya in Cape Town to found the Bantu Theatre Company, who now toured with Hugh Tracey's *Chief Above, Chief Below*.

The year ended with *Dick Whittington*, for which African Consolidated Theatres brought out the infectiously smiling Terry-Thomas. The pantomime was directed by Frank Rogaly, a dear friend whom I met then for the first
time. Like me, Frank was a complete nut about theatre, but one who had found his niche working for ACT and directing. ACT, however, never tolerated failure, and when one of Frank’s shows flopped at the box-office, he was punished with a transfer to Port Elizabeth.

When Frank finally left African Theatres, he opened a booking facility in Port Elizabeth and became the person every management consulted about touring a show to that city. He looked after visiting artists on a very personal level, as I myself would do in Johannesburg, and was one of the most universally loved men in the history of the South African theatre. It was his unstinting effort that saved the old Port Elizabeth Opera House from the demolishers and led to it being declared a national monument. A few years before Frank died, the Opera House commissioned a portrait of him which they invited him to unveil. To this day, it looks beneficently down on theatregoers as they mill round the foyer.

The new year, 1953, kicked off with *Twelfth Night*, another triumph for Leonard Schach and the National Theatre. Always one of Leonard’s favourite Shakespeares, he would direct it again for the Theatre Royal du Pare in Brussels, and once more, in Afrikaans, for the National Theatre. Later in the year, Leonard (whose Cockpit Players were flourishing in Cape Town) returned to Johannesburg to direct *The Young Elizabeth*, based on the life of Elizabeth I and presented by the Reps to mark the coronation of
Elizabeth II. Coincidentally, the cast included aspiring writer Theo Aronson, who would go on to make his mark with a series of biographies chronicling the lives of the British royals.

The Reps had started the year's season with yet another revival of Rodney Ackland's *The Old Ladies*, directed by Minna Schneier. She returned to the Reps rehearsal room to direct Aldous Huxley's *The Gioconda Smile* but left to give birth to her daughter Cara and was replaced by her sister-in-law Shirley Wakefield.

Meanwhile, another Minna, Minna Millsten, directed the Reps production of Noel Coward's *Private Lives*, a hardy perennial reflecting Coward at his glittering best. As Amanda, the role originally written for Gertrude Lawrence and since played by dozens of famous actresses including Dame Maggie Smith, was Marjorie Gordon, also fondly known as Maggie and a favourite with critics, audiences and colleagues. Maggie was a vibrant personality and a real trouper, blessed with superb actress' instincts and a strong presence. English-born, she had a zest for life onstage and off, and enjoyed a successful career in London, largely in musical comedy. Invited to Australia, she made an impact on their theatre scene in several musicals, then turned to straight acting with singular success. Two world tours included New York and, in 1940, Johannesburg, where ACT presented her company in a season of plays. An extremely accomplished actress and comedienne, she had appeared in plays as disparate as Coward's *Design for Living* and the
now forgotten melodrama, *Susan and God*. After her global wanderings, she chose to make her home and career in South Africa to the benefit of the profession. She died in 1981, aged only sixty but having given pleasure in enough shows to fill a book.

The Reps celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary in 1953. They marked the quarter-century during which they had become the backbone of Johannesburg theatrical life with a production of Colette’s *Gigi*. The title role (played on Broadway by a then unknown Audrey Hepburn, and in the film musical by Leslie Caron) was taken by Tessa Laubscher, who would desert the greasepaint for the chisel and become a noted sculptress.

Tessa was also seen as Rosalind opposite John Rudd's Orlando in *As You Like It*, directed by Taubie Kushlick for Children's Theatre. This was an open-air production, staged at Rhodes Park, where the sylvan setting made a perfect Forest of Arden that entranced even the uniformed school parties who were brought along to improve their acquaintance with Shakespeare.

It was Children's Theatre's busiest and most successful year since their inception, culminating with Colin Romoff’s production of *Treasure Island* at the Wits Great Hall. The show had an authentic Long John Silver in Felix Cooper, a dependable regular of the East Rand Theatre Club, who had lost a leg in the war.

In May, Leon Gluckman appeared opposite Molly Seftel in Ferenc Molnar's *Liliom*, the play on which Rodgers and
Hammerstein based the musical, Carousel. It was directed by Cecil Williams, as was Maxwell Anderson's Winterset in which Leon also starred (while, typically, rehearsing for Christopher Fry's, *The Firstborn*). Leon also found time to direct James Ambrose Brown's *The Governor* at Black Rock for the East Rand Theatre Club, for which the assistant stage managers were myself and a then little-known person named Barney Simon who would leave an indelible mark on the culture of this country in years to come.

Also, in May, JODS produced Johann Strauss' *The Gypsy Baron*, starring Rita Roseman and a handsome young Italian immigrant named Sergio Calli who had a very good voice. Sergio became something of a star locally but went on to greater things in America. There, an introduction to the great impresario Sol Hurok brought him a name change to Sergio Franchi and a terrific career in cabaret and television.

The big show of the year was Ivor Novello's *King's Rhapsody* which, along with Barry Sinclair and Muriel Barron, starred the contralto Olive Gilbert and the aristocratically elegant Zena Dare. During the run of the show, stage manager, understudy and small-part player Anthony Farmer was offered the position of resident producer and stage director for the Reps Theatre. He accepted with effect from the following January.

The year had its quota of attractions for sports fanatics, too. Scotland's Dundee team came to play soccer and won their test series by two matches to one, while rugby fans
were able to see Australia's Wallabies, making their first visit to South Africa in twenty years. They narrowly beat Transvaal at Ellis Park and Eastern Transvaal at Springs in June, but sweet revenge came in July when Transvaal won.

The Tucker family had some theatrical events of their own with the weddings of my brothers Maurice and Sam. In October, Mossie married Joyce Goddess in Benoni. Just before the ceremony, the heavens opened, releasing a downpour that went on for several hours. The unfortunate bride and her retinue had literally to be carried into the reception at the Town Hall, and some of the eight hundred guests who were coming from Johannesburg never made it because the roads were washed away. Fortunately, the weather was not a warning to the young couple: forty-four years later they are still happily married and living in Benoni, the only members of the family still to do so.

In December, the family set off for the Durban wedding of Sammy and Barbara Kaplan, whom he'd met while they were both students at Wits. Sammy was completing his medical internship at the time. A year later, he and Barbara emigrated to London where, as a specialist paediatrician, he cared for the children of many world-famous people in the arts, from classical conductors to actors, film-makers and pop stars.

I returned from the wedding and an excruciatingly hot Durban feeling extremely ill and was diagnosed as having hepatitis. A six-week spell in hospital followed, from which I emerged weighing only 120 pounds and looking like an
overgrown scarecrow. I returned to Mendel Gutkin, Accountants, in February of 1954, but change, at last, was just around the corner
Nineteen-fifty-four saw burgeoning developments in the professional theatre of South Africa, and marked a year of great change in my own life. I must turn the clock back a couple of years to trace the events that led to my finally finding a place in the business I so longed to be part of.

Early in 1951 ACT had announced that eight operas would be staged at His Majesty's with a full Italian company of singers, including orchestra, sets and costumes. Though it was not otherwise a star-studded ensemble, the legendary tenor Beniamino Gigli would sing Mario and Tito Gobbi his world-famous Scarpia in gala performances of *Tosca*. Gigli would also give some recitals.

By then I, and my similarly inclined friends in Benoni, had an informal but active little music society, and whenever a major attraction was announced in Johannesburg I was delegated to book for all of us. On this occasion I was besieged with orders from our members, not to mention their friends and relations, and found myself holding a thousand pounds of cash with which to buy dozens and dozens of seven-and-sixpenny tickets for various performances. Instinct told me that usual procedures wouldn't get us very far and so, with booking opening on a Monday, I packed a small bag with a pillow, a
sweater, a toothbrush and some sandwiches, and set off for the theatre after work on Friday.

Sleeping on the pavement in order to see a show had not yet become a popular occupation, but it caught on that weekend. I was astonished to find two people ahead of me already, and by Saturday afternoon there must have been a couple of hundred stalwart opera fans camped round the block holding numbered queue tickets.

I wouldn't want to repeat the experience, but it was great to have it once. The camaraderie of the crowd was terrific, and I met Hymie Groer, one of the intellectual musical giants of Johannesburg, who worked at the specialist music store, Recordia, which he later bought. We established a firm and lasting friendship during those three long days and nights, and I, along with many music lovers, was saddened by his premature death from a heart attack in 1981. The opera booking finally opened at 8.30 on Monday morning. ACT cashiers manned a row of tables set up on the stage and we were called in by number. I can hardly describe my astonishment, disappointment and fury when, on requesting the seven-and-sixpenny tickets, I was told that only the two guinea tickets were available.

This information provoked a heated outburst from me. I pointed out that I had been third in the queue, sleeping on the pavement for three nights. How, I asked, was it possible that these tickets were already sold. I checked with Hymie and the others at the front of the queue to see whether they had snapped them all up, but they were having the same
problem. I demanded to have the tickets, but to no avail. Finally, the cashier told me that the management had reserved them for the use of their own friends. I had no option but to do some quick arithmetical contortions, buy as many expensive seats as the money would allow, and explain this to a lot of disappointed people in Benoni.

I didn't however, let it rest. I demanded to see someone in charge and was steered in the direction of Jim Stodel, General Manager of African Consolidated Theatres. He was totally indifferent to my problem and deaf to my complaints, which sparked my anger further. Shouting at the top of my voice, I informed the queue that the whole system was a seam, and berated Stodel for his treatment of the public. One day, I told him, I would open a booking office and show him how it should be done.

This spontaneous declaration surprised me as much as anyone else, but it turned out to be prescient. I'd sown the seed of my own future, which had briefly been nourished in London when Leonard Schach had casually introduced me to the centralised booking agencies such as Keith Prowse. That, I had thought, was what Johannesburg needed, but the thought had vanished with my return home.

While recovering from hepatitis, I had read an American play called Affairs of State by Louis Verneuil. Its tale of domestic intrigues and political manoeuvrings behind the polite facade of Washington D.C. society was couched as comedy, and it had had a successful run on Broadway and in the West End. When I came out of
hospital I gave the play to Leon Gluckman to read with the idea that I back it and he direct it. In those days, a one-set play with a couple of professional leads and a supporting cast of amateurs cost no more than a few hundred pounds, and, although it would have cleaned out my savings, they were sufficient to cover the costs.

Leon didn't share my enthusiasm but suggested instead that I might like to fill the post of business manager for his forthcoming production of *King Lear*, directed by Elizabeth Sneddon, in which he would play the title role. I accepted with alacrity, only to find that no systems were in place for organising the booking, marketing and servicing of a production at the Wits University Great Hall (or, as I soon learnt, at any other venues for hire).

Independent semi-professional companies had nobody to handle press publicity, poster distribution or advertising; there were half-a dozen different stores with booking desks where you could place tickets; the management of the show was expected to provide ushers and programme sellers, and budgetary control was a haphazard affair. No wonder Leon saw the need for a business manager.

I took on these disparate tasks, seeing to the paperwork at the crack of dawn and after hours, and rushing around the town in my lunch break to supervise the printing and booking arrangements. The production of *King Lear* was not successful. Leon admitted that he was far too young for Lear but felt he might never have another opportunity to
play the role which, with Hamlet, is the ambition of every serious actor. Shakespeare's great tragedy, however, proved the catalyst in my career.

Handling the business practicalities of the production recalled my visits to Keith Prowse in London and rekindled the passion and threat of my outburst to Jim Stodel at His Majesty's three years previously. It was obvious to me that Johannesburg needed a centralised booking office, and this was the time to provide it. Bursting with excitement at this revelation which might provide an answer to my unfocused ambitions, I shared my thoughts with Leon and his assistant, Audrey Cobden, over a morning coffee in his office. Out of this informal chat, I found myself with two partners, both in agreement when I spontaneously suggested we call the venture 'Show Service'.

The decision taken, the plan gathered momentum with extraordinary speed. We obviously had to have a centrally situated office, and one with space for the queues I never doubted would form. As a veteran of queues, I was obsessed with this aspect and insisted that the space be under cover. I took to meeting Leon and Audrey in my lunch hours and, miraculously, within a week we had found what we needed. A new building, African City, had opened at 100 Eloff Street and there was a ground floor office at the end of its arcade. It was ideal, and available at an initial monthly rental of forty-five pounds.

Audrey and I planned a budget. Clearly, the office would have to be partitioned and fitted with a kitchenette,
two desks, cashier's equipment, headed stationery and, of course, the lifeline of such an enterprise, a couple of telephones. Lean's brother, Michael, was an architect in partnership with Rick de Beer, and we put the design in their hands. After much agonising over the figures, Audrey and I settled on a sum of £1 400 to cover all initial expenditure and working capital.

Leon and I each invested £600 and Audrey put in the additional £200. We were ready for business, and I had at last found the way to marry my accountancy training to my passion for the theatre. There were, however, a couple of hurdles to overcome. The first was to convince the managements that they needed our services and drum up some business- and until that business began to come in, I would have to remain on at Mendel Gutkin, Accountants, and earn a living. Thus, it came about that Audrey would run the office and I would have to content myself with lunch hours and early evenings spent there.

On 16 August 1954, within three months of our initial discussions, Show Service opened. That night we held a little party in our 'queuing' arcade, a space which would be at the centre of much elation and many dramas over the next few years. Among the guests were critic and journalist Percy Baneshik, a loyal promoter of our cause, as well as journalists from the then popular social pages. Michael Gluckman came, and Leon's close friend Herman Lowitt, a great supporter of the arts, as did Taubie Kushlick, Cecil Williams, Dr Henry Gluckman, my mother and my then
pregnant sister-in-law Joyce.

My father, however, was missing from the gathering. He had been stunned at my decision to go into business as a 'ticket-seller' - a lowly peddler of inconsequential wares as he saw it. He had suffered a traumatic childhood, but had built up a successful business, sacrificing himself to give his family security and a start in life. He felt I was throwing the privileges of my education down the drain and refused to speak to me for a year. He was always a man of few words, but it was a most odd situation living at home with a father who pretended I wasn't there, and I think it was only viable because I was out far more than I was in. When I left Mendel Gutkin to devote myself full time to Show Service, I broke the silence to tell him this and the breach was healed. It was, however, many years before he would actually discuss the business with me or take an interest in it.

Meanwhile, during the months leading up to August, and beyond, I didn't neglect my theatregoing or my spectator sport. In April, the Israeli soccer team made its first visit to South Africa and, naturally, the Tuckers, the Nestadts and most of Benoni's Jewry were at the Rand Stadium for their first match, against Southern Transvaal. Later in May, I saw the quaintly named Heart of Midlothian team from Scotland.

Shortly after coming out of hospital, I read that Danny Kaye had been booked by ACT. The son of Russian Jewish immigrants, Kaye had begun his career as a stand-up comic at Jewish resorts in up-state New York before making a
dazzling Broadway debut in the *Straw Hat Revue* and marrying the show's composer and pianist, Sylvia Fine. With his carrot-yellow hair, mobile face, expressive hands and inimitable rapid-fire patter, he became a household name in the States, and a world-famous box-office attraction through his films.

He was coming to Johannesburg at the height of his fame, and audiences were happy to pay two guineas for the best seats. The season quickly sold out, and I was lucky to be among the ticket-holders. But, alas, the show was a terrible let-down. The night I was there, Danny appeared totally cut off from and uninterested in his audience, doing no more than what is called 'walking through' his act. To make matters worse, he turned on the audience, reviling them for their lack of involvement. The result was that the brilliant ventriloquist who called himself Señor Wences stole the show. I was taken by some friends of John Schlesinger's to a party for Danny Kaye, but never got to meet him since his off-stage behaviour was a continuation of his on-stage tirade. I learnt that one's idols sometimes have feet of clay.

Anthony Farmer, who became a good friend from whom I learnt much about the theatre, arrived in Johannesburg in February to take up his full-time position with the Reps. His influence soon showed. Although trained as a draughtsman and engineer, Tony was obviously born with a show business gene in his make-up. He had acted in his early youth and, after the war (when he worked on
aircraft engine manufacture), applied his aptitude for making things to the British film industry, working for the set construction department at the Rank Organisation. He later studied acting and production and revealed a superb talent for stage design although he had no formal training in it. Farmer's flair as director and designer was fully evident in his second production for the Reps, Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution*, for which he designed a replica of the Old Bailey. Robert Griffiths and Sadie Festenstein played the roles immortalised on screen by Charles Laughton and Marlene Dietrich, and the show was a triumph, playing to one hundred per cent capacity.

Show Service began in the year that Leon, very much a silent partner owing to his heavy theatre commitments, directed *You Never Can Tell* for the National Theatre, and Taubie Kushlick *She Stoops to Conquer* for the same organisation as well as an Afrikaans translation of John Van Druten’s *I Remember Mama*, which starred Wena Naude, Johann Nell and the furniture borrower of my childhood, Mathilde Hanekom.

From abroad came The Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet with its own orchestra. In addition to their classical programme, they brought ballets by John Cranko and Alfred Rodrigues, internationally famed South African-born choreographers whose work, astonishingly, had never been seen in this country. We saw Cranko’s *Pineapple Poll*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lady and the Fool*, and Rodrigues' *Blood Wedding* as well as the world premiere of
Percy Tucker

his *Cafe des Sports*. South Africans were prominent among the leading dancers, too: Maryon Lane, Patricia Miller, David Poole, Dudley Davies, Gilbert Vernon and Maurice Metliss. It was a stunning season.

African Consolidated Theatres brought Maurice Schwartz and his Yiddish Art Theatre Company from New York to His Majesty's. Having learnt from my overseas experiences that top-class theatre transcends language barriers, I was undaunted by my very limited Yiddish (learnt in the company of my grandparents) and was completely absorbed and entertained by Schwartz's productions. Maurice, whom I was fortunate to get to know, was a dedicated man of the theatre who specialised in translations of English dramatists, including Shakespeare, and the great Russian classicists. He played in a much more restrained and classical style than the mannered and flamboyant Yiddish companies I had previously seen and was fascinating to watch.

ACT brought the great tenor Jussi Bjorling for a recital series. The concerts were sublime, but Alex Cherniavsky and Jim Stodel found it a troublesome time. Somewhat foolishly, they took Bjorling on a trip to the Game Reserve, a hospitable gesture which misfired since the rigours of the journey badly affected his throat. They could not, however, be held responsible for the singer's drinking problems and consequent unreliability, which also bedevilled the Metropolitan Opera in New York, as its general manager Rudolf Bing told me some years later.
Of course, after August, whenever I attended one of these events - still standing in queues and rushing to various stores in search of tickets - my pleasure was tempered with frustration. How, I wondered, were we to obtain the booking rights. That, after all, was the object of opening Show Service. Meanwhile, there were the practicalities of our little business to sort out.

When Show Service opened, my only box-office experience was as a ticket-seller on the night of the performance in the Benoni Town Hall for the East Rand Theatre Club. It was obvious that we had to have a system to separate advance bookings, and to be able to identify the days on which the tickets were paid for, if we were ever to be able to balance the books. I solved this with the use of coloured pencils - blue to mark the seats sold on Mondays, red on Tuesdays, yellow on Wednesdays, and so forth. At the end of the day, we would cross through the day's colour, count the number of tickets and balance the cash accordingly.

I'm sure that most people have never heard of a now defunct organisation called the South African Theatre and Music Association (SATMA), or of a German tenor named Marcel Wittrisch, but both are emblazoned on my mind forever, because SATMA's presentation of Wittrisch, in two concerts with Nellie du Toit and accompanist Albie Louw at the Johannesburg City Hall in September 1954, brought Show Service its first booking.

A combination of some advance publicity for Show
Service and a Benoni connection on the SATMA committee gave us the contract. We agreed to write and insert the newspaper advertising (at our own expense!) and supply ushers and programme sellers for the performances. With ticket prices at four shillings and eightpence, three shillings and sixpence and two shillings and tenpence, and a far from capacity audience, our fee of five percent on advance ticket sales left us inarguably in the red. We did a tiny bit better with our second commission, a celebrity concert in aid of the National Theatre Development Fund, put on by the National Theatre at the Reps, which came through the good offices of Breytie Breytenbach. The line-up of performers included Andre Huguenet, Dawie Couzyn, Margaret Inglis and, needless to say, Taubie Kushlick.

Taubie, who had had a tremendous success earlier in the year with the thriller *Dial M for Murder*; asked us to handle the reservations for her production of Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy*, which had been a major hit of the 1953 Broadway season, starring Deborah Kerr (who recreated the role on screen). Set in an American boys' boarding college, this moving and perceptive play deals with the anguish of a sensitive student who is driven to despair after his failure to 'make it' with the local good-time girl, which leads to accusations of homosexuality, is saved by the headmaster's unhappy and sympathetic wife, who takes him to bed.

The play was particularly powerful for its time and, in a fine production featuring Margaret Inglis at her best and a
suitably fragile and brooding young actor named John Templer, it was a great success. (I saw the play again in Paris, with Ingrid Bergman superb as the housemaster's wife). *Tea and Sympathy* marked the beginning of my long professional relationship with Taubie and introduced me to more of her singular ways. She was constantly on the phone demanding a bulletin on the state of her bookings - nerve-wracking calls that taught me a lot about keeping an eagle eye on box-office figures. My mother, however, was rather less taken with Taubie's business acumen which led to her phoning me at home at six o'clock every morning.

Brian Bell, a tall, well-built and good-looking blonde actor in his late teens had a major supporting role in *Tea and Sympathy*. He went to England where, as Brian Murray, he successfully played in nine productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company, among them Peter Brook's famed production of *King Lear* with Paul Scofield, and Peter Hall's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Brian settled permanently in New York, where he became well known as both actor and director.

Brian has occasionally returned to work in South Africa and has been a regular visitor to my home. He is an amusing and interesting dinner companion, albeit one with a hyper-sensitive ego demanding of attention- a common characteristic among actors who, under their extrovert surface, are actually very insecure.

In October 1954 Dodds Miller, the manager of the SABC
Orchestra, walked into the office to enquire about our service. We showed him the set-up, and a few days later we were offered a contract to handle all bookings and season tickets for the orchestra's concerts as from the beginning of 1955. We also undertook to provide staff at the City Hall where Ian Ransome, the present cashier, is the son of my first programme seller, Eileen. Computicket was handling this contract over four decades later.

Business and friendship arrived hand-in-hand with the advent of Cyril and Peta Fisher, the husband and wife team who built up Musica Viva, which they took over from Jose Rodriguez-Lopez. In importing musicians, the Fishers dared to encroach on territory which had long been the sole preserve of African Consolidated Theatres and impresario Alex Cherniavsky and made a great success of it. Musica Viva became a prominent feature of Johannesburg's cultural life.

Cyril, a practising accountant, was the business brain, dealing with contracts and functioning as a ministering angel to visiting artists unable to cope with the vagaries of their income tax. Peta, Cyril's charming and delicately redhead wife, had the more public profile since it was she who engaged and looked after the artists. A former harpist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, her love of music and her commitment to quality brought much enrichment to the country as a whole.

What the Fishers lacked was the know-how to organise national tours. Consequently, I became closely involved in
that aspect of their concerts, acting as tour manager on several notable occasions. Our first meeting, however, concerned a recital to be given at the Wits Great Hall by the American pianist Julius Katchen, for which the Fishers asked Show Service to handle the ticket sales and the front-of-house staffing. So, began a lifetime of friendship which ended in 1994 with Peta's death, followed a month to the day later by the death of Cyril.

It would be a little while before we would get the volume of custom Show Service desired and needed, but we had done it. I was the managing director—albeit in absentia for several hours a day—of my own brainchild and, with Audrey, I had successfully serviced my first shows.
CHAPTER TEN
AT YOUR SERVICE

Where 1954 had marked a turning point in my own life, 1955 saw significant growth in the professional theatre in Johannesburg and, by extension, the country. The Durban Intimate Theatre Company, entering its third year of existence, paid its first visit to Johannesburg; the Reps mounted nine highly polished productions in their first full year as a totally professional company; Ruth Oppenheim, who had staged an occasional production, formed her own regular company and brought a new kind of theatre, serious and often experimental, to Johannesburg audiences, and Taubie Kushlick celebrated twenty-five years in the theatre with a two-play season at His Majesty’s. In deciding to disband his Cape Town company, Brian Brooke vacated the Hofmeyr Theatre, which became a full-time home to Leonard Schach’s flourishing Cockpit Players.

Most significantly of all—certainly to me who had already begun to doubt the wisdom of opening a booking service whose only possible customers appeared to be independent companies mounting short seasons at the Library Theatre, the Technical College, the Wits Great Hall and, for concerts, the City Hall-Johannesburg welcomed the opening of no less than three new theatres.

The Windmill Theatre had sporadically been used as a
venue for the occasional variety show or African music concert. Then Margaret Inglis discovered the rough-and-ready premises, a former shop with basement storerooms at 277 Bree Street, and produced, directed and played Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet* with Siegfried Mynhardt as the Prince of Denmark. The production failed to draw audiences, and the public remained largely unaware of the Windmill's existence until Ruth Oppenheim announced her occupancy with a core company and an ambitious programme of drama outside the commercial mainstream.

German-born Mrs Oppenheim had worked as both an actress and a producer with several of the great European companies before emigrating to South Africa, where she established a successful drama school and occasionally acted or directed in Johannesburg. She bent her considerable energies to improving the Windmill, but this 300-seat auditorium remained an essentially dank and unadorned theatre, reminiscent of the experimental theatres off-Broadway which so often produce exciting work under inadequate conditions.

Ruth's choice of programme reflected her European background, and the Windmill acquired a devoted band of followers who appreciated the opportunity to see plays with a difference. Unfortunately, the devotees were insufficient to keep the enterprise alive for longer than a couple of years before the Windmill was forced to close.

However, it opened with high hopes and high ideals in April 1955 with Ruth’s production of Pirandello’s *Six*
Characters in Search of an Author, the company of actors led by Berdine Grunewald. During its relatively short life, Ruth Oppenheim's company staged Albert Camus' Caligula with Stanley Coghlan as the deranged Roman emperor; Christopher Isherwood's I Am A Camera with Tessa Laubscher as Sally Bowles; a bloodthirsty season of Grand Guignol, and a stage version of Andre Gide's novella, The Immoralist.

This last, set in Algiers, was an effective production. It caused moral outrage with its frank and erotic depiction of the seduction of a repressed English homosexual by a predatory Arab street boy. Charles Stodel gave a riveting performance in the latter role, ably supported by Stanley Coghlan as his victim and Berdine as the Englishman's anguished wife.

The next theatre to open was purpose-built and supplied by an unexpected benefactor, the YMCA, which had decided to attach a theatre to its premises at the north end of Rissik Street. Later appropriately renamed the Intimate, it became home to many managements who enjoyed successful runs there, but the 'Y was its own management for its opening production, Dodie Smith's romantic comedy I Capture the Castle. Jimmy Mentis was invited to mount the production and did so in sets by Anthony Farmer and with a cast that included Shirley Firth. In time, Shirley would be closely involved with this theatre as her own management and in partnership with Pieter Toerien.
I had cause to be particularly delighted by the opening of the Windmill and the YMCA as their bookings were entrusted to Show Service, alleviating my fears that there would be insufficient work to keep us going.

But, indubitably, the major event of the year was the opening of the Brooke Theatre in De Villiers Street. The story of why and how this theatre came to be built is told both movingly and amusingly by Brian Brooke in his autobiography, *My Own Personal Star*, and is far too long to go into here. Suffice it to say that the building of this gracious, comfortable, technically well-equipped house was a triumphant testimony to faith, commitment, and a determination to give Johannesburg a theatre that befitted a major city, and Brooke's own company a permanent home. After nine years of being almost the sole provider of top-class commercially popular entertainment at the cost of great personal struggle and sacrifice, Brian Brooke and Petrina Fry richly deserved their theatre. That it was built at all was a sort of miracle, for few were willing to take the risk of backing what they perceived as the impractical dreams of a man in a notoriously money-losing profession.

The opening night, on 13 September 1955, conclusively pulled the rug from under the feet of the cynics. The former Apostolic Faith Mission had been beautifully converted by architect Felix Fels into a warm and welcoming theatre, elegantly wallpapered in maroon and dull gold to match the gold fittings and seats upholstered in traditional red plush. The intimate foyer was entered via a handsome flight of
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marble steps, fittingly rescued from the Brooke's predecessor, the Standard, and the crowning glory - one on each side of the proscenium - was a pair of candelabras which had originally come from Blenheim Palace, the grand seat of the Dukes of Marlborough (Winston Churchill's family) in England.

Brian had opted to open the Brooke Theatre without any gala ceremony -just another opening night - and the only speech was his own very brief thank you when the curtain fell. It was the right approach, for the evening proceeded without the barriers of elitism and formality that so often attach to gala occasions. Even the last in a series of setbacks that had attended the building of the theatre contributed to the enjoyment of the evening: for reasons that were never discovered, the front-of house staff staged a last-minute walk-out, whereupon a group of Brian's friends, ex-army and air force types, stepped into the breach. The seating mix-up that ensued added extra friendliness, not to mention hilarity to the proceedings.

For his opening production Brian had chosen Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*. It was directed by Michael Finlayson, who had come from London to join the Brooke company, and starred Petrina Fry as Hester Collyer, the part I had seen Peggy Ashcroft create so brilliantly. Although the diminutive Petrina was a very different personality from Ashcroft, her performance matched that of the great English actress for excellence, and the audience was spellbound. It was a wonderful occasion, the first of
many in this lovely building which brought a much-needed increase in professionalism to the Johannesburg theatre.

After the unqualified popular and critical success of *The Deep Blue Sea*, the Brooke staged two Broadway hits, both directed by Michael Finlayson, *The Seven-Year Itch* and *Teahouse of the August Moon*. In the female lead of both was a young Grahamstown girl who had only recently joined the company in Cape Town as a lowly assistant stage manager and trainee bit-part player.

A five-foot-nothing gorgeous gamine with a bubbly personality, natural star quality and an unmistakable voice, her name was Heather Lloyd-Jones and her rise from ASM to leading lady was meteoric. South Africa, arguably, has not had a home-grown star with Heather's box-office appeal before or since. Managements could have advertised her in a reading of the phone book and attracted an audience. Heather married the choreographer and former dancer, Frank Staff (they later divorced) and eventually, to the disappointment of her legion of fans, retired from the stage to open a specialist antique shop.

Despite the fact that it would be some years before the booking for the Brooke Theatre would pass to Show Service, I spent many happy hours there, not only as a member of the audience. I got to know Brian's production manager, Robert Langford, who had been brought from England (and who would later marry Margaret Inglis) and struck up a very cordial relationship with Connie Rainsford, who presided
with expert authority and friendliness over the Brooke box office. I was always sorry that Connie was never a member of my own staff when Show Service expanded. I also spent time backstage, hobnobbing with actors and technical personnel. That I was so freely allowed to hang around the theatre was doubtless due to the lucky association I had had with Brian almost exactly a year previously when Show Service was in its infancy. Within a few days of our opening, I read that Brooke was bringing the Welsh actor-playwright Emlyn Williams to South Africa with his internationally acclaimed one-man show, 'Charles Dickens'. I had seen this tour de force during my visit to London and felt sure that Mr Williams' formidable impersonation of the great novelist reading from his works would captivate audiences here as much as it had done elsewhere. The short Johannesburg season was to be presented at the Wits University Great Hall.

I had never met Brian Brooke, but I immediately arranged to see him. I told him about Show Service and asked him to give us the Dickens business. He questioned me closely about my experience in handling not only bookings but also advertising and publicity for a show of this stature. I was quite honest in my reply but assured him that my strength lay in my enthusiasm and commitment which, combined with such little experience as I had had, would deliver the services he required. After a nail-biting week of waiting, Brian called to say that he would entrust the show to us.
There was little time before that late September opening and, what with my nine-to-five job at Mendel Gutkin, it was a baptism of fire. Newspaper advertisements had to be written and placed, posters printed and distributed, publicity stories organised, and front-of-house staff put in place. Selling tickets was the easiest of our tasks, particularly as the advertising attracted a large and enthusiastic public and the season was the success that Brian had anticipated.

I had been given a set of the complete works of Charles Dickens for my Barmitzvah (I still have it) and had read several of the novels with pleasure. To see the cleverly linked extracts from half-a-dozen of them brought so brilliantly to life by this extraordinarily gifted man was an untrammelled delight. I was there every night, either backstage or out front, watching and listening with fascination as Emlyn (who I had the pleasure of getting to know), transformed himself into Dickens and his immortal characters. As well as a flexible voice and impeccable timing, he had the sine qua non of all great actors - expressive eyes that alternately sparkled, flashed or darkened with rage or sadness.

Somehow, I had met the challenge and traversed new territory. Brian Brooke was pleased with our services, and the experience renewed my optimism and confirmed my confidence in our venture. The Emlyn Williams commission had given our business a lift, and shortly afterwards I invited Mr Breytenbach to visit our offices. By
the time he left, we had agreed that Show Service would act as sole ticket sellers for the National Theatre. I was delighted, but would have killed to get the Reps business, a contract for which I would have to wait until 1958.

By the mid-Fifties the Reps were a fabulous success story. Muriel Alexander’s carefully nurtured group of dedicated amateurs had blossomed into a well-oiled machine which had supplied a generous diet of varied and entertaining fare for twenty-six years. In September 1954, with their own lovely theatre, Anthony Farmer in charge and a subscription membership that ran into thousands, they announced that they were turning fully professional.

The queues at their own box office, first at Polliack’s music store in Eloff Street, then at Bosman's Arcade around the corner, far outstripped those at Show Service. Late in 1955, due to the cold winter winds that whipped through the Arcade, the Reps moved their booking to the second floor of the Belfast department store in Market Street.

Marjorie Cordon went into partnership with actors Stuart Brown and Bruce Anderson to form The Company of Three. Their first presentation was the aptly titled Third Person, which also played at the Reps - to my sorrow, as I had hoped to get in on the ground floor of the new company's booking.

Aside from the opening of the Brooke Theatre, the big excitement of 1955 was the visit of the crooner Johnny Ray, who came to the Colosseum for African Consolidated
Theatres at the height of his fame. Johannesburg gave him one of Jimmy Mackenzie's ticker-tape welcomes and a 'royal' appearance on the Carlton Hotel balcony. Rendered deaf by a childhood accident, Johnny Ray wore a hearing aid and made a huge career between 1951 and 1956 as a crooner who sobbed his heart out on stage, hopping about in a parody of grief which sent his largely youthful audience into a matching frenzy of hysteria. His most famous single was appropriately titled 'Cry'.

Johnny was a skinny, pallid, sunken-cheeked man, who wore baggy trousers on stage and slicked his mousy hair flat with water, but he had an endearing vulnerability which communicated itself to the audience. He told me that his handicap had cut him off from his friends as a youth, leaving him isolated and hungry for emotional contact. I think his ability to put across these feelings was the key to his success. Strangely enough, early in the year, the Durban Intimate Theatre Company had paid their first visit to Johannesburg with a production of Vernon Sylvaine's farce, *As Long As They're Happy*, whose joke resided in a spoof on Johnny Ray.

The Intimate had contacted Show Service to handle publicity and bookings but, on the day the company was due to arrive on the Durban train, I received an early morning distress call from Norman Coombes, the play's director, to tell me that the train had been involved in a serious accident. The opening night would have to be postponed by a couple of days, which meant informing the
critics and the paying public and reissuing the tickets.

It was all systems go to sort out the ensuing muddle but, in the midst of the flurry (and worry), a sixth sense told me that this tragic accident could, ironically, give the show some valuable publicity. I rang the news editor of The Star, to find that he hadn't yet heard about it, and the front page of that evening's edition was headlined 12 KILLED AND 37 HURT IN TRAIN CRASH. A few weeks later I received an unexpected cheque for five pounds from The Star for giving them a scoop. Meanwhile, the play had opened to more publicity than anyone could have hoped for.

This involvement with the Durban Intimate company brought my first meeting with Aubrey Louw who was then its stage director; less happily, he also filled in as a supporting actor when necessary, an occupation which, in this play, drew the observation from critic Oliver Walker that Aubrey's supposedly German accent was rather more reminiscent of the platteland than of Berlin.

During 1955, their first fully professional year, the Reps justified the change in their status with the standard of their productions. For the British comedy, My Three Angels, Tony Farmer brought English actor John Boulter to our stages for the first time. John settled here permanently, and with his distinctive voice, chiselled face and strong presence, became one of the country's valued leading men. He also directed from time to time, giving his services to the Wits University Players in 1957 with a production of Julius Caesar in which Calpurnia was played by a B.A. student
named Janet Suzman.

Having secured the rights to all Agatha Christie's plays after his success with *Witness for the Prosecution*, Tony Farmer directed *The Spider's Web*. It starred the glamorous Yolande Turnbull in her last performance before she left for London where, as Yolande Turner, she met and married film star Peter Finch (they later divorced). Brian Bell appeared in *Bus Stop*, Bill Brewer made his first appearance for the Reps in *Dear Charles*, and the gracious and lovely Edna Jacobson, who had worked for the National Theatre, played the lead in *Rose Without a Thorn*. She gave up her career to marry the international financier Mandy Moross.

The National Theatre took the Reps for their production of Rattigan’s *The Winslow Boy*. The title role was played by Brian Proudfoot, whose youthful looks and demeanour made him a perpetual juvenile for years after he had passed the age. The lawyer who cross-examines the boy accused of theft was played with much success by Clifford Williams (not to be confused with our own Cecil Williams), who had come from London the previous year to conduct the Trinity College speech examinations. I got to know Clifford who kept me fascinated and amused over many lunches with his tales of theatrical life in London. He went back there and became an associate director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, as well as directing Kenneth Tynan's ground-breaking revue, *Oh, Calcutta!* in London and Paris.

By the end of January 1955, I had realised that it was
impossible to continue working elsewhere if Show Service was to grow and prosper as intended. I handed in my resignation and, in March, left Mendel Gutkin, Accountants, who, I imagine, were probably relieved to see the back of this peculiar auditor who rushed in and out of the offices a dozen times a day and was never available for staff get-togethers.

In March, Taubie Kushlick produced and directed novelist Graham Greene's play, *The Living Room*, at the Library Theatre. This powerful drama about a young Roman Catholic girl who has an affair with a married man and is destroyed by her conscience, made a star of Dorothy Tutin in London. Taubie's excellent production cast Anne McMenamin (later Curteis) in the role. I handled the bookings, and the dawn telephone calls to the family home at 121 Princes Avenue resumed ...

Later in the year, Taubie celebrated her quarter-century in the theatre by directing two American plays at His Majesty's in association with ACT. The opening nights were glittering occasions, as Taubie's friends, colleagues, and the local jet-set turned out to support her, but her choice of material was rather odd and the season a disappointment.

The first play, *The Desperate Hours*, about three violent thugs who hold a family hostage, was a gripping thriller, very well acted- particularly by Bill Brewer as the chief thug and Sadie Festenstein as the mother of the family- but His Majesty's was far too large for this type of play and
audiences found it difficult to engage with the drama.

Everybody found it difficult to engage with the next play, *The Fifth Season*, despite the fact that it starred the American actor Joseph Buloff, who had played the lead on Broadway. Ostensibly a comedy about the slack (or 'fifth') season in the New York garment industry, it was a laboured and unfunny affair, at the end of which applause signified relief rather than enjoyment. During rehearsals, the town was alight with gossip about the flaming rows between Taubie and her visiting star and, in future years, it was good policy never to mention Buloff's name in her hearing.

The most entertaining feature of this venture was Taubie's expansive and self-congratulatory opening night speech. She concluded each generous mention of other managements with a reminder that she had made it to His Majesty's, a venue which, in fact, she somewhere deeply resented because it was designed also to function as a cinema, and because she blamed ACT for the loss of the Standard Theatre.

Work continued to come in to Show Service in a slow but steady trickle: Henry Miles' one-man Shakespeare show at the YMCA; at the Library Margaret Inglis produced *Love in Idleness* (in which she co-starred with John Hussey); the Company of Three did *Two Dozen Red Roses*, and Lean Gluckman his monumentally ambitious production of André Obey's *Noah*. Lean donned a flowing white wig and beard to appear as the biblical patriarch, but the play was a dreadful failure.
However, during auditions for *Noah*, a young model named Pamela Reed came along. I had seen her in the Jewish Guild's amateur production of Count Your Blessings at their own little theatre in Bree Street the previous year and been struck by her good looks. I was present when she came to audition, a breathtakingly lovely apparition in white. Lean was instantly smitten, gave her a part, and married her in July 1956, putting paid to the hopes and dreams of every unmarried Jewish girl in Johannesburg society.

Selling tickets, as my father would have it, was not all roses. In 1955 we accepted the contract to book for a variety show called *Hollywood on Parade* in aid of a charity. The promoter brought out a clutch of Americans, some of whom such as screen cowboy Tex Ritter, actors Don DeFore and Pat O'Brien, and the legendary Hungarian femme fatale Zsa Zsa Gabor, were better known than others.

In the event, the most amusing thing about the show was an incident, widely reported in the press, when a jealous suitor knocked out the well-known polo champion and playboy Derek Goodman during a fight in Zsa Zsa's dressing room. For us and our customers, *Hollywood on Parade* was a miserable experience. The show was staged at the Wembley Ice Rink, where the management fixed wooden seats to a wooden board over the ice floor. The audience, particularly the first-nighters in their flimsy finery, nearly froze to death, and an enterprising entrepreneur could have made a small fortune out of selling
cushions, not to mention blankets and aspirin.

The Wembley fiasco brought my first brush with a dissatisfied public. Their complaints were thoroughly justified, but, alas, they were directed at Show Service, who were blamed for selling them the tickets in the first place. The incident taught me evermore to be on my guard against the unfamiliar, though there would be other disasters which no amount of care was able to deflect.

In 1955, ACT brought out Sir Edmund Hillary, the first conqueror of Everest, to give lectures at the Plaza Theatre. On the night I attended, Alex Cherniavsky and his wife invited me to join them afterwards for dinner with Hillary. It was a joy to be in the company of this modest and gentle man, whose strength of character and positive philosophy of life were evident in his conversation and personality. I detected the same qualities in astronaut Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon, whom I met in similar circumstances at Milner Park in 1979.

By now, South Africans had been living under the rule of the Nationalist government for eight years and, if blacks had been virtually invisible in the theatre world before 1948, there seemed little chance of matters improving. Indeed, over the years they would go from bad to worse, en route to the Group Areas Act in 1965. That blacks as a group had not chosen to attend the white theatre or had been prevented from doing so by force of economic circumstance was one thing; to be forbidden to do so by the threat of arrest was quite another. It is shameful to relate
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that only a handful of people, Leon Gluckman foremost among them, were actively disturbed by such iniquities and worked to alleviate the cultural deprivation suffered by the black community.

A small group of such concerned people was involved in 1953 in the formation of the Union of Southern African Artists, an organisation which assisted African artists to get their own shows together for township audiences, and in arranging special performances by visiting artists (Emlyn Williams was one of several) and occasional productions of local plays for black audiences.

Meanwhile, the privileged sector of our society lived their lives as before, largely untroubled by such considerations. The year ended with Anthony Farmer's production for the Reps of Larger than Life, a rather dated comedy-drama, based on Somerset Maugham's novel Theatre, and dramatised by the author with Guy Bolton (a collaborator of P.G. Wodehouse, creator of Jeeves). The attraction of this piece was the guest appearance of the British star of stage and screen musicals, Jessie Matthews, well past her prime, but also well and fondly remembered by the bulk of the Reps membership who were unaware of her neurotic backstage behaviour and flocked to see her in a straight play.

I rushed off to join the queue on the day preferential booking opened and found chaos raging at the Reps box office. Incredibly, a record ten thousand seats were booked on that first day, and by the time I reached the top of the
queue, the cashier, Joy Hillier, was a nervous wreck, on the verge of tears. Hadn't I, she asked, got a job for her? I had. Joy joined Show Service a year later, and soon found herself dealing with even bigger queues.

Meanwhile, back in Eloff Street, where we had now acquired two fulltime cashiers, things were looking ominously quiet as the year drew to its close. I celebrated New Year's Eve wondering whether I had made a mistake in leaving Mendel Gutkin, Accountants.
The famous English singing partnership of Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth specialised in light classics and operetta, music which harked back to a romantic age that was fast disappearing (their signature tune was 'Only A Rose'). Their popularity had been kept very much alive by radio and a tour of major cities in South Africa and they decided to return with a concert tour to rural areas and smaller towns- what is known as a 'B' tour.

Peta Fisher steered them to Show Service and I was confronted with a new set of challenges and experiences: setting up venues, making all arrangements, and travelling with them in the capacity of a personal and business manager.

So, between late January and the end of February 1956, I went into the unknown with this charming husband-and-wife team and their accompanist Arthur Tatler, for the first time encountering the dubious delights of dealing with the unsophisticated platteland community. Never mind the fact that some of the halls were indescribable and Arthur had to do his best on a tinny upright piano, some of the incidents that occurred were, in retrospect, cherishable.

During a performance in Bethal, Webster had launched into his rendition of the song 'Trees' when a dog appeared
on the stage, made straight for the mock tree standing in the centre, urinated, and exited as casually as he had entered. I've still no idea how the dog got there, but Webster was convinced that I'd arranged it. A charity in a remote farming area had bought up two concerts to be performed in neighbouring towns on successive nights. After the first concert, Anne was presented with a lavish bouquet which was whipped away from the startled star immediately after the show. When I queried this, the charity's chairlady told me that if the flowers weren't immediately put in the fridge, there would be no bouquet for the next concert.

At a mayoral reception in Bloemfontein, His Worship apologised to the invited guests for the fact that there were only two singers on the stage, and promised them, at the very least, a trio or quartet the next time around! Anne and Webster remained here until 1978, teaching, and starring in numerous shows, beginning with *Spring Quartet* for Leonard Schach in Cape Town in September.

I thoroughly enjoyed the tour, relishing my close involvement with the artists, and also learnt a good deal about the nuts and bolts of organising such an expedition. There was, however, a bigger challenge on the horizon. The Johannesburg City Council decided to commemorate the seventieth birthday of Johannesburg by holding the largest arts festival ever seen in South Africa. It would take place in September, and the programme would be designed by a committee under the directorship of Ernest Fleischmann.
(His distinguished career as an orchestral conductor culminated in his becoming the Executive Vice-President and Managing Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra). Mr Fleischmann would be assisted by Mrs Peta Fisher of Musica Viva.

Peta informed me of these plans early on. I knew it was imperative that Show Service tender for the booking contract. Nobody had ever handled bookings in Johannesburg on the scale anticipated - nobody had had to. Audrey Cobden and I realised that, should we succeed in our mission, our premises would be much too small. Fortunately, two floors above us in African City Buildings were standing empty and, in anticipation of getting the contract, I arranged to lease them. Reckless, perhaps, but I had to convince Fleischmann and his committee that we were equipped for the task.

After much discussion and many meetings, we were awarded the contract in April. Postal bookings were scheduled to open on 25 July and remain in force until 16 August when non-postal booking would commence - the date was that of the second anniversary of the opening of Show Service and is one to which I've superstitiously adhered for key events ever since.

We were jubilant. The Festival was the big fish we'd been longing to catch. Luckily, perhaps, we didn't know what we'd let ourselves in for and, meanwhile, there were a few other events to occupy my interest, if not much to engage the efforts of Audrey and her staff.
A material indication of the growth of professionalism in the theatre was the formation of the South African Association of Theatrical Managements early in 1956 (followed in 1957 by the foundation of Actors' Equity). The first meeting was attended by Brian Brooke, Leonard Schach, Margaret Inglis, Leon Gluckman, Anthony Farmer for the Reps and Breytie Breytenbach for the National Theatre. I was present, by invitation, to represent Show Service. This was the first signal that I was being taken seriously by the managements. They saw Show Service - although it was still in its infancy- as an organisation of value in keeping managements informed of trends in public opinion, helping them to avoid duplications in their own programme planning, and advising on the length of a show's run, based on box-office projections.

Thus I found myself in on the ground floor of an organisation formed to safeguard standards and nurture good practices; and, gratifyingly, was legitimately at the heart of the business which was central to my professional ambitions and personal fulfilment. I remained on the committee until it was dissolved when political change came to South Africa. I now sit on the executive committee of a new organisation - the Theatre Managements of South Africa.

My status was growing, but the same couldn't be said for my bank balance. The National Theatre and the concert impresarios were taken up with planning their Festival contributions, while the Brooke Theatre, the Reps and ACT
continued to be serviced by their own booking offices. There was a steady trickle of business, but we needed a flood, and there was comparatively little activity at the cashier's desk in Eloff Street. Our income from the Festival would not materialise until it was all over so, in June, Leon, Audrey and I decided to take the precaution of converting Show Service into a private company. The shareholding, in proportion to our original investment, gave Lean and me six hundred shares each and Audrey two hundred.

I was, however, directly involved in the presentation of a production by Leonard Schach which broke new ground in theatre. In November of the previous year Leonard had directed Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* at the Little Theatre in Cape Town. Beckett's absurdist morality play, dense with symbolism and grim humour and having no beginning, middle or end in the accepted sense, had been all the rage among serious theatregoers in London and Paris. South Africa had never been exposed to anything like it, but Leonard's gamble had paid off and he badly wanted it to be seen in Johannesburg. But where and how?

I thought Lean and Taubie were the ideal producers for the project and approached them on Leonard's behalf. They agreed to back the play in association with Leonard - the first and last time that these three influential figures collaborated - and *Waiting for Godot* with Alec Bell, Gerrit Wessels and Gavin Haughton, opened in March for a limited season. Despite being staged at the dreaded Technical College, the play attracted audiences and
became a major talking point among the intelligentsia, provoking outrage, bewilderment and enthusiasm in equal parts.

Also, in March, Anthony Farmer directed the ingenious thriller, *Dead on Nine*) for the Reps, and followed this with *The Remarkable Mr Pennypacker*. Unfortunately, after these two productions Tony had to leave for England where his father was ill, cutting short his contract with the Reps. He declined to take up his position again on his return, so Anthony Cullen was engaged. He only lasted for one production (of T.S. Eliot's The Confidential Clerk) before set designer Roy Cooke took over the running of the theatre, with directors hired per play, until Hugh Goldie from England joined the company as resident director in 1959. Tony Farmer, meanwhile, decided to freelance, and went into a new phase of a career that flourished in several areas. Following his policy of bringing out British actors, Brian Brooke presented Dame Sybil Thorndike, a grande dame of the English theatre, in a series of drama and poetry recitals with her husband, Sir Lewis Casson. I was delighted to renew my acquaintance with this great actress (whom I’d met briefly in London with Leonard) and to enjoy her artistry. Characteristically, Dame Sybil, a warm, lovely person, willingly played for a black audience at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre.

The English actor-director Leslie French came to direct *The Tempest* for the Reps. A small, fragile man, he was the most famous Ariel of his day, a part he now entrusted to a
suitably sprite-like young actor named David Crichton in this impressive production. Leslie, whom I would get to know well, became a regular director of Shakespeare for Cecilia Sonnenberg and Rene Ahrenson's Maynardville Open Air Theatre in Cape Town. In 1963 Leslie was presented with the Key to the City in recognition of his services to Cape Town's cultural and educational life. Also of interest (particularly to Show Service!) in the pre-Festival period was Taubie's production of *The Waltz of the Toreadors*, and the African Jazz concert series, starring the Manhattan Brothers and Dorothy Masuku, presented at the City Hall by Alfred Herbert. Alfred was one of the first people to promote black entertainers, both in the townships and beyond. His Johannesburg concerts were enormously popular but of course were performed to segregated audiences.

The programme for the Johannesburg Festival was announced in the press in April, and we realised that Show Service had its work cut out - always provided the public shared our interest and enthusiasm, which we wouldn't know until postal booking opened in July.

On the musical side, the London Symphony Orchestra under conductor Jascha Horenstein would pay its first visit to South Africa, and Sir Malcolm Sargent his second, as guest conductor of the SABC Symphony Orchestra. Sir Malcolm's programme would include a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Mimi Coertse as one of
the soloists. The South African soprano, already successful overseas, was given leave from her contract at the Vienna State Opera to perform here. Mimi, and visiting mezzo-soprano Nan Merriman would also give solo recitals.

Other internationally esteemed soloists who were engaged included the French cellist Pierre Fournier, the Spanish classical guitarist Andres Segovia, and British violinist Yehudi Menuhin. The symphony concerts were scheduled at the City Hall, the solo recitals divided between the City Hall and the University Great Hall. Pianist Claudio Arrau would appear under the auspices of African Consolidated Theatres who would handle his bookings - the only Festival item not in our hands.

The La Scala, under the artistic directorship of Victor de Sabata, was bringing three productions to His Majesty's: Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*, Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, and Mozart's sublime *Cosi Fan Tutte*. This last would be conducted by one of the world's most sought-after younger conductors, Guido Cantelli, who, tragically, was killed in an air crash not long afterwards. Tenor Giuseppe di Stefano, then at the height of his career and ranked among the greatest in the world, would head the company, together with Luigi Alva and soprano Graziella Sciutti. Di Stefano would also give solo recitals.

There would be a series of concerts by the Italian chamber group, I Musici, while, at the Plaza, Mantovani and his Orchestra would provide entertainment for devotees of non-classical music. A special evening of works
by South African composers would include the premiere of John Joubert's opera, *In the Drought*, directed by Anton Hartman, but the local musicians drew the short straw - the Technical College.

An entertainer with a difference, the unique American comedian Anna Russell, was slotted in for a series of her one-woman shows at the University Great Hall, while, on the drama front, local managements agreed to mount special productions for the Festival. Brian Brooke, however, preferred to carry on with his programme as usual.

The Reps announced that their Festival production would be Terence Rattigan's *The Sleeping Prince*, directed by Minna Schneier with Moira Lister and Joss Ackland in the roles created in London by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. (This romantic comedy was filmed in 1957 as *The Prince and the Showgirl* with Olivier and Marilyn Monroe). For once, as part of the Festival package, Show Service would be responsible for the Reps bookings.

The National Theatre chose Shaw's *Candida* with Margaret Inglis in the title role, while their Afrikaans arm would stage Dirk Opperman's *Periandros van Korinthe* and a translation of Ferenc Molnar's *The Play's the Thing* (*Gekonkel in die Nag*), both directed by Anna Neethling-Pohl. Children's Theatre would offer *Mango Leaf Magic* for young audiences, and the well-known Afrikaans amateur group, JAATS, had secured the rights to premiere the poet and playwright Uys Krige's *Die Goue Ring*. Outside of the official Festival, the YMCA had been booked by the Arena
Theatre Company during the Festival period and presented Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning* starring Jenny Gratus, Robert Lang and Will Jamieson, and Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*, with Beryl Cordon and Arthur Hall. With Ruth Oppenheim continuing her season at the Windmill, and the National Theatre, Children's Theatre and JAATS at the Library, there were no available venues left. The result was that neither Taubie nor Leonard was able to mount a production. Leon Gluckman (billed as Leon Ryan) was in Australia, co-starring with Katharine Hepburn, in a Shakespeare season with the Old Vic Company. International stardom was beckoning him, and I had no idea when I would see my friend and business partner again.

The line-up was impressive by any standards, but nothing brought a bigger air of excitement than the announcement that the Western world's most worshipped ballerina, Margot Fonteyn, and her partner Michael Somes, had agreed to dance the second act of *Swan Lake* in Johannesburg. This would form the climax of a ballet programme organised jointly by the Pretoria Ballet Club and the Festival Ballet Society (which would dance *Mr Pickwick on Ice* choreographed by Marjorie Sturman), while Patricia Miller would dance the second act of *Coppelia* with the University of Cape Town Ballet. The corps de ballet supporting Fonteyn and Somes during their six performances at His Majesty's would be drawn from the three local companies, and the Durban Civic Orchestra
would be in the pit, conducted by Jeremy Schulman.

There was much preliminary organising to be done at Show Service. In addition to overseeing the enormous number of tickets to be printed, numbered, priced and dated for some one hundred events at ten venues, we had to supply the front-of-house staff at independent venues such as the City Hall, the University Great Hall, the Library Theatre and the Technical College. Hiring the people and co-ordinating them with the venues was a major headache, and we had to set up a department specifically to deal with this. The complete programme with its application form for postal bookings was printed and distributed in the last week of June. At this stage, while we'd leased the extra floors in the building as a contingency, I still didn't know what the response would be, and I hadn't installed furniture or telephones. At Peta Fisher's suggestion, the Musica Viva box number was given as the address for Festival applications to prevent them becoming muddled up with the normal Show Service post.

A few days after the booking forms had been made available, I took myself off to the Jeppe Street Post Office to check Box 25. To my intense disappointment, it was empty but for one lonely slip of paper. This proved to be a curt note from the Postmaster, ordering me to present myself to him urgently. Entering his office, I picked my way through piles and piles of boxes heaped on his floor, to be met with a tirade informing me that the boxes, overflowing with mail,
were all for the Festival, and why hadn't I collected them. I stared at the volume of post in disbelief before apologising profusely and asking for help to take the boxes to my car.

There was no question of going to bed that night, or for countless nights thereafter. The hundreds of envelopes in the boxes contained thousands of pounds in cash, cheques and postal orders, attached to booking forms. At this stage the booking plans were not entirely ready, the VIP and press seats had therefore not been allocated, and I was in a quandary as to how to deal with this torrent of mail from an unsuspecting public. I realised that, despite the experience I had gained I was still a novice when it came to something as complicated as this. Everything was at stake, however, and I had to find a solution.

Next morning, propped up by the adrenalin of urgency and a sleepless night, I ordered half-a-dozen large tables and a dozen chairs for immediate delivery to the empty offices upstairs, begged and pleaded with the GPO for the installation of several telephones, and called up every friend and relative I could think of who might come to the rescue. I rustled up about twenty of them in the short term, including my longsuffering mother and the ever-loyal Ethel and Zelma London. Initially, it took six people nearly twelve hours just to open the envelopes and sort them into piles, date-stamping them in order of receipt and giving each application a number. My 'volunteers' formed a pool of paid part-time helpers, who worked shifts as and when they could, and, within a week, we had also hired ten full-time
staff for the duration of the booking period. Many of them doubled as ushers and programme sellers during the Festival itself. Show Service turned into a madhouse overnight and the enormity of our undertaking, which I had fought so hard to secure, was only beginning to dawn on me.

The booking procedures were complicated and extremely time-consuming. Most of the applications over-ran the space on the forms, which were attached to letters detailing the customers' further requests; the greatest care therefore had to be exercised to ensure accuracy, and we certainly could have done with the computers that I would introduce a couple of decades later. However, we soon settled down to a methodical system that worked smoothly, but another problem arose - Margot Fonteyn. It seemed that everybody in the country, not to mention the then Rhodesia, wanted to see the great dancer, and everybody wanted the most expensive seats.

The demand was truly massive, and we soon ran out of top-price tickets (Gala opening four guineas; all other performances two guineas) and had to offer alternatives. In my naivety, I initially telephoned every applicant personally to explain the situation, but it soon became clear that every call made brought six incoming calls from their friends to know why they hadn't been phoned. We quickly put a stop to this and resorted to the mail which, in those days, could still be relied upon to reach its destination, and quickly.

The second most sought-after attraction was the La
Scala Opera, and the problems were the same as those for the ballet. I learnt for the first time how much power came with having access to tickets, as I mysteriously started becoming immensely popular in the town. Droves of supposed friends and acquaintances came out of the woodwork, jamming the phone lines with dinner invitations - and requests for tickets. I acquired former classmates I never knew existed; their solicitude was overwhelming!

My life became a total nightmare.
CHAPTER TWELVE
MUSIC. MARGOT AND MAGIC

It was obvious that the first Johannesburg Festival was on course for success on a scale beyond anything the committee had envisaged. People were requesting seats for as many as twenty different events, and when the ballet and opera were sold out, we had to make out refund cheques and write explanatory letters to the unlucky applicants. Chaos reigned as our letters brought answering correspondence from some and phone calls from others, insisting that they were candidates for preferential treatment. It was a dogfight, during which I had to try and keep my head and, more difficult, remain polite in the face of public aggression.

To cope with this, Show Service installed a help line, the first ever in South Africa. This turned out to be something of a double-edged sword, often seeming more of a complaint line than an avenue of assistance. And the higher the social status of the caller, the more vociferous the argument. The socialites couldn't countenance missing a gala, an opening night, or any event at which they felt they must be seen. In all the years I was in the ticket business this never changed, and one soon learnt to sort out the fair-weather friends from the genuine article.
The questions we were asked and the arguments we were given were a real eye-opener. The first displayed a surprising degree of ignorance, the second arrogance beyond belief. These patterns, too, never changed—working with the public is an education in human nature.

Among the many gems I remember: 'My daughter is going to be a great ballerina. She must sit in the front row, so she can hear the music'; 'I will only sit in the first three rows—because my best friend is the Mayoress'; 'I can't possibly sit on the right-hand side for the concert. I have to be able to see whether the pianist is playing the right notes'; and, my favourite, which I would hear many times in the future, the caller who was enquiring about the opera and asked us to be sure that her seats were 'facing the screen'!

To add to the organisational problems, the University Great Hall in those days used the rather curious American system for numbering side block seats with alternate numbers—two, four, six, eight etc on one side, one, three, five, seven, on the other. Thus, when we could only offer singles, we would have to explain that, for example, seats C3 and C4 were on opposite sides of the auditorium. After the Festival I obtained permission from Wits to renumber the Great Hall permanently.

In mid-August, with personal booking open, the pandemonium increased as queues stretched down our arcade into Eloff Street. It was becoming impossible for me to commute from Benoni, so when Cecil Williams needed to sub-let his penthouse flat in Anstey's Buildings, a mere
block away from Show Service, I seized the opportunity.

Cecil Williams, a schoolteacher by profession, was an erudite man who also directed plays, generally serious works dealing with moral or philosophical issues. What I didn't know was that he was a member of the banned Communist Party and on the surveillance list of the security police. During my stay in his apartment I answered a number of mysterious phone calls, though it was only much later that I realised the line had been tapped. I can't imagine what the police must have made of some of my conversations, such as the observation that 'Graziella Sciutti was flat in her upper register' (during a performance of *Cosi fan tutte*). They must have thought I was speaking in code.

Also, during this period, a friend of Cecil's, Mrs Rica Hodgson, who often came into Show Service to buy tickets, asked me whether she could have Cecil's mail redirected to my office during his absence from his flat, a more reliable system than entrusting it to the caretaker of Anstey's Buildings. I readily agreed, and the mail continued to arrive long after I had left the flat, together with other letters, addressed to people whose names were unfamiliar but which all seemed destined for Rica Hodgson. I was too busy to give much thought to this until, in January 1961, I opened and read one of these letters in error.

I was appalled to discover that I had unwittingly been acting as a postal address for Communist Party literature, a
situation which could quite easily have landed me in jail for subversive activities, and I felt a clutch of fear at the thought that the authorities might be aware of it. While privately sympathetic to the anti-government cause, I wasn't willing to go to jail for it. Next time Rica came in, I took her for a quiet chat and made my sentiments known. The mail stopped, and I never saw her again. I later learnt that her husband, Jack Hodgson, was the first demolition expert for the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe.

The sad coda to all this was the arrest of Cecil Williams and his 'chauffeur' on the Durban road on 5 August 1962. The chauffeur was Nelson Mandela. I last saw Cecil in London in the late Sixties after he had skipped the country, another casualty of apartheid and a loss to the teaching profession and the theatre in South Africa. He died in Scotland many years later, never having been able to return here.

September 1956 rolled around at last, and with it, on the sixteenth, the official opening of the Festival at the Johannesburg City Hall. The honour of the first event had been awarded to Claudio Arrau and the SABC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jeremy Schulman. The heightened atmosphere in the City Hall reflected the sense of occasion, and the customers certainly got their money's worth (prices ranged from two guineas to five shillings) as the eminent pianist treated them not to one but to three piano concerti - Chopin, Brahms and Beethoven. The following night the
first gala performance was given by the London Symphony Orchestra.

The English composer William Walton honoured the city's endeavours by composing the Johannesburg Festival Overture, premiered at the first of the symphony concerts under the baton of Sir Malcolm Sargent. Music was indisputably the major component of the Festival, with a concert in one form or another every night until 27 October. However, the enthusiasm and excitement that had been generated spilled over to all the events, and the theatres found themselves playing to consistently large audiences.

The most successful of the plays was Minna Schneier's production of *The Sleeping Prince* at the Reps, which played to capacity and had to extend its scheduled run. Johannesburg theatregoers were thrilled to welcome back their own Moira Lister after an absence of twelve years, during which time she had overcome her early struggles in London and become a star. Her rise had begun with a miraculous contract with the Shakespeare company at Stratford-on-Avon where she played Juliet, Desdemona in *Othello*, Olivia in *Twelfth Night* and Kate Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* in the space of one season. From there she never looked back, working successfully in the West End - notably opposite Noel Coward in *Present Laughter* - appearing with Jack Buchanan on Broadway, and starring on television in *The Best of Dorothy Parker*; a series of her own devising.
Looking stunning in imported gowns, Moira brought polish, glamour and sophistication to the Reps stage. Her leading man, Joss Ackland, a skilful British actor played leads for Leonard Schach's Cockpit Players before returning to England and forging a successful stage, TV and film career. I saw him create the role of General Peron in the original West End production of *Evita* in 1978.

The first of the La Scala Opera gala openings took place on Saturday 22 September. It was a thrilling occasion at which one of my duties was to see that Mrs Giuseppe di Stefano was safely conducted to the seat reserved for her for all her husband's performances. The following Saturday Mrs Di Stefano arrived shortly before curtain-up to discover that the box-office cashier, following instructions to sell unused house seats (seats reserved for the management), had done just that. The tenor's wife marched into the manager's office, phoned backstage and instructed her husband to have the curtain held until she was seated in her usual place in the dress circle.

I had taken my own place in the stalls when a call came over the tannoy summoning me to the manager's office. There I found an agitated Maria di Stefano gabbling in Italian to her companion, the manager of His Majesty's and a distraught Peta Fisher. They despatched me upstairs to persuade the occupants of A7/8 to vacate the seats; if I failed, there would be no performance.

My pleadings with the couple were to no avail, and the restless audience was growing aware that something was
amiss. I ran downstairs, grabbed a couple of boxes of chocolates from the sales counter, raced to the box office and demanded the ticket money back from the now thoroughly confused cashier, and sped back to the manager for two chairs to be placed in the aisle. The fire chief was apoplectic at the sight of the chairs, but I was beyond caring. Finally, the cash, the chocolates and the chairs persuaded the obdurate pair in the circle to move. Mrs Di Stefano swept in, waved to the audience and gave the conductor the signal to begin. In the 1990s, Maria di Stefano came back to South Africa on a private visit and we had a good laugh over the incident.

My introduction to the extra-refined sensibilities of musicians came with the first Andres Segovia recital at the University Great Hall. Segovia entered, sat down, took up his guitar and remained stock still. Quite suddenly, without having played a note, he strode off the stage. A hubbub broke out in the audience and Peta Fisher and I ran backstage. Segovia was sitting serenely in his dressing room. 'Unless the air-conditioning is switched off I will not play' he said calmly. It was a very hot night, but the audience uncomplainingly took off their jackets. Segovia's genius proved worth the slight discomfort. What had disturbed the artist, who required absolute silence, was the hum of the air-conditioning machinery.

Anna Russell was a sensation. She had an electrifying personality and her unusual, brilliantly satirical material, as well as her performance technique, was hysterically funny.
Although trained as a serious student of classical music, Anna's sense of humour prevailed, and she had taken the sacred cows of opera and *lieder* and shaken them by the scruff of the neck, to the delight and relief of her appreciative audiences. Her version of Wagner's 'Ring' cycle, in which she condensed twenty hours of opera into one side-splitting hour of brilliant summary, was both educative and hilarious, and has become part of classical music folklore the world over.

With all seats for Margot Fonteyn sold out in record time, leaving thousands of disappointed people clamouring to see her, we had an emergency meeting with Ernest Fleischmann, who wrote to Margot, pleading for her to come earlier or stay longer. She was able to offer one extra performance and an inspirational idea was conceived: build a stage on the Zoo Lake, the perfect setting for Swan Lake, and erect a grandstand that could accommodate at least six thousand people. The plan was carried out, and the tickets, at a cost of two guineas each, were sold out in a matter of hours to those on the waiting list and new hopefuls in the queue. Also, for this performance, blocks were set aside for school bookings, giving many youngsters an experience, they would never forget.

To paraphrase Charles Dickens, the Festival period was, for me, the best of times and the worst. I worked a twenty-hour day and lost thirty pounds in weight I was wracked with anxiety and besieged by problems. Yet it was the most enriching and exhilarating period in my working
life to that date. I relished my contact with the performers and treasured the experience of seeing them give of their best on our local stages. I rushed from venue to venue nightly, checking on front-of-house efficiency and backstage organisation, and snatching a taste of each concert or opera or ballet or play. I came as near as possible to being in three places at the same time. But at the gala opening of the ballet with Margot Fonteyn, I broke this lunatic routine and stayed firmly in my seat from beginning to end.

The curtain went up on the opening of the ballet on 15 October in an atmosphere of electric anticipation such as had seldom been felt in Johannesburg. Time stopped, and reality had no meaning when Fonteyn danced. The expressiveness of her eyes, the eloquence of her movement, in which strength and fragility combined to magical effect, defies description. Not since the great Russian, Anna Pavlova, marvelled those who remembered, had anyone so perfectly realised the Swan Princess. At the end of the performance, the audience lost all control, cheering and screaming, as flowers poured onto the stage. As she had done at Covent Garden, Fonteyn divided a bouquet, presenting a flower to her partner, Michael Somes, to Jeremy Schulman the conductor, to the orchestra. With characteristic modesty, she always took only one solo call, at which the applause went on and on and on, and the 'bravos' erupted into an unending chorus. It was a night of sheer magic, which would be repeated at each of Fonteyn's
appearances.

The best bonus for me was that, thanks to the naivety of the City Council in omitting to build in an expenses budget for visiting artists, Cyril and Peta Fisher and I took Margot out to dinner after each of her performances. I thus came to know and treasure her as a friend.

By 7.15 pm on 20 October, six thousand expectant people were seated at the Zoo Lake. The waiting stage in the centre of the Lake was bathed in moonlight, as were the resident swans gliding on the water around it. Then, over this scene of sheer enchantment, the heavens opened in a typical Johannesburg cloudburst which lasted for fully half an hour. NOBODY MOVED. It was really quite astonishing. The audience waited patiently, determined they would not be denied their special occasion. Patience was rewarded. Council workers set to work drying the stage, the dancers inspected it, and at last the orchestra struck up and the ballet began.

Fonteyn and Somes were received with applause so rapturous as to eclipse even their opening at His Majesty’s. I was backstage with Jeremy Schulman when, after their tenth curtain call Margot, aware that many of the audience were schoolkids, said, 'They're so wonderful - and so wet. Let's do it again.' I ran out to witness the reaction to this announcement, and the roar that went up could only be compared to the noise at a World Cup rugby final. The temporary stands almost overturned under the stamping feet. That night has lived on for all who were present, and
even now I can't drive past the Zoo Lake without reliving it.

After such a triumphant success, it was very sad to read that the Pretoria and Johannesburg ballet companies who had supported Margot had exhausted their financial resources in doing so and had to disband. Small offshoot companies continued to work as best they could until 1960 when, happily, they were able to reconstitute as the Johannesburg City Ballet.

At the close of the Johannesburg Festival, the takings were in excess of one million pounds, a record sum that surpassed all projections. Under the terms of the contract between Show Service and the City Council, it was agreed that I would balance the books and pay the total revenue to the Council. Within forty-eight hours of receiving the money, they would issue a cheque to me for the sums owed in commission on ticket sales and refund of expenses.

This arrangement would, of course, empty out the Show Service account entirely for a few days and something needed to be done. I went to see the manager of the Bree Street branch of Barclays, where we banked, and explained the situation, requesting bridging finance while I completed the transaction with the Council. My request was refused. Inwardly boiling with rage, I instructed the manager to close the account immediately and issue me with a cheque. Taken aback by this turn of events, and no doubt suddenly aware that I was going to walk out of his bank with over a million pounds, the manager asked me to reconsider. I refused point blank, collected the cheque and
went back to my office where I phoned Cyril Fisher to ask where he banked.

That afternoon, I walked into the Netherlands Bank of South Africa in Fox Street with my large cheque from Barclays and explained the situation for the second time that day. The manager rang the City Treasurer for confirmation of my standing and opened an account without further ado. Thus, I began my association with what is now Nedbank, an association which has continued for forty years, during which massive sums have passed through the account which, in due course, changed from Show Service to Computicket. I think it's fair to say that their manager's misjudgement cost Barclays dear.

The Festival had been something of a rite of passage for me. I had learnt a very great deal and would always look back on it with fondness. Meanwhile, I had the sad task of releasing my temporary staff before looking to how Show Service was going to survive in the aftermath of all this excitement.

Quite uncharacteristically, I began the rethink by taking a day off and getting some much-needed sleep.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN
HOME AND ABROAD

After the high-octane routine of the Festival, my life seemed too quiet for comfort. I decided to make the move to Johannesburg permanent and I stayed with Peta and Cyril Fisher until I found a suitable flat in Hillbrow, in those days a safe, convenient and congenial place for a bachelor.

We were approached by Hans Adler, chairman of the Johannesburg Musical Society (JMS), to take care of their future bookings. Founded in 1902, this was Johannesburg's oldest cultural society, presenting eight concerts a year. Their substantial membership paid an annual fee (four guineas at that time), in return for which they received a pair of free tickets and the advantage of preferential booking for each event.

The JMS was, and still is, the best cultural bargain in the country for many years chaired by Suzanne Margolis, a devoted lover of classical music and the society's main benefactor.

It was just as well that I greatly admired the Musical Society, because our commission was tiny and the booking procedures a nightmare. Queues were long, and the demand that I had heard during the Festival - for seats on the left-hand side whenever a pianist featured- resurfaced with horrible regularity. We got into many arguments with
customers who refused to understand that it was impossible to grant this request to everyone. I sometimes wondered whether I should invest in the building of a long, narrow hall with all the seats on the left!

But business, though steady, was essentially stagnant. With our clientele basically confined to the independent venues, while ticket sales flourished at the Brooke, the Reps and African Consolidated Theatres box offices, Show Service needed the Big Idea- which is how Leon came up with a scheme to enrol members in a telephone delivery service for those theatres that were not on our books. Members could order tickets for a particular theatre, we would buy them on their behalf, and either deliver them to the customer's office in town or leave them marked for pre-show collection at the theatre.

It seemed like a good idea on paper, especially when our membership drive brought a substantial response, but in practice it was disastrous. Most requests were for opening night tickets, which meant I would have to employ extra staff or do it myself. Since the first was not financially viable, it had to be the second, and I found myself back where I had started, particularly for a big show at His Majesty's or the Colosseum, getting up at dawn to secure a place near the front of the queue. On occasions when booking opened for two shows on the same day, I had to get a body to stand in one of the queues for me.

After a few months of this routine, I had had enough. The problems of satisfying the customers were endless, the
delivery logistics problematical, and my own hours horrendous. It soon became clear that the income earned was far from sufficient to justify the time, trouble and inconvenience, and I wrote to Leon explaining the situation. Being so distanced from the reality, he was unable to appreciate the problem and we had our first and only disagreement.

When Leon came on a flying visit from abroad, we discussed the matter. He also expressed concern that his continued absence and his commitment to his own work prevented him from being of any practical use in furthering Show Service. We came to an amicable agreement that Lean would withdraw from the business, selling his shares to me. Audrey Cobden followed suit, and after she had collected her cheque I never saw or heard from her again. Lean and I remained very close friends. Thus, it was that, early in 1957, I became the sole shareholder in Show Service (Pty) Ltd, not to mention the sole carrier of its burdens.

There was plenty of post-Festival activity at the Reps and the Brooke. Michael Finlayson directed the last two shows of the year for Brian, *The Reluctant Debutante* which marked Joan Blake's first appearance for the Brooke Company; and *Salad Days* a tuneful, high-spirited show which was a sort of cross between a musical and a revue. Brian also brought Emlyn Williams back in December with Dylan Thomas: *A Boy Growing Up*. The Welsh actor did more than justice to the Welsh poet, but the show was less
popular with the public than the Dickens had been. This time my only involvement was as an appreciative spectator.

Taubie’s Christmas production was a huge success and gave a lift to the town and to Show Service. Best described as a children’s show for all ages, *Listen to the Wind* is a delightful play, combining fantastical characters with lots of plot, comedy, romance and songs. A large and expert cast - Joyce Grant, Elizabeth Meyer, Brian Proudfoot, June Hern, Maureen Adair and Philip Birkinshaw (an outstanding performance as the 'Gale Bird') among them - played in eye-catching sets by Pamela Lewis that quite transformed the Library Theatre’s stage. Families booked second and third visits, and even Mrs Kushlick was happy with the box-office figures.

As 1957 got under way, nothing much changed. There were several interesting and entertaining events to engage audiences, but nothing pointed the way to the expansion of Show Service where I worked in tandem with my two faithful cashiers.

Children’s Theatre had put their bookings in our hands during 1955 and I had formed a good working relationship with them. In the summer of 1957, inspired perhaps by the memory of Margot Fonteyn’s success, they mounted an open-air production of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Zoo Lake. The cast, under the expert direction of Cecil Williams, was headed by Rory MacDermot as Shylock and Valerie Philip as Portia, and the production was lavish. The Venetian settings, designed by Len Grosset, included not
only gondolas, fountains and arches, but a recreation of the Rialto bridge; Louis Jacobson's costumes were sumptuous. Came opening night and the inevitable happened: the heavens opened, and the rain beat down for half-an-hour. This audience, unlike Margot's, ran for cover, attempting to crowd into the sales kiosk. To add to this misfortune, it had also rained in the afternoon, and by the time the damp playgoers reassembled, the accumulated water had affected the electrical system and the sound was distorted.

An application for black audiences to attend was rejected by the City Council, so a special performance was given at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre. Naturally, since the production had been specially designed for the Zoo Lake, the township theatregoers were sold short. *The Merchant of Venice* proved to be Children's Theatre's last open-air Shakespeare production.

During April, African Theatres brought the Spanish dancer Luisillo, and his company, to His Majesty's, the first of three such visits. Packed houses testified to the insatiable appetite of South African audiences for the fiery flamencos strummed, sung and danced by slim-waisted youths and their graceful female partners (who included South Africa's Mercedes Molina). This enthusiasm for Spanish dance assured the success of later visits by the great Antonio, and the Jose Greco company.

The Reps programme for the year included three unusually interesting productions. Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* was directed by Leonard Schach with the
Irish actor Niall MacGinnis starring as Eddie, the Italian-American longshoreman whose suspect devotion to his daughter leads to crisis when she becomes involved with a young immigrant cousin, whom Eddie accuses of being a pansy. That role was played by Louis Burke, then a young actor from Durban making his first stage appearance in Johannesburg. Louis, who was Muriel Alexander's great-nephew, had to dye his dark, luxuriant hair blond for the part, but the hairdresser got a bit carried away and produced a helmet of hair so brightly peroxided that Louis never dared venture forth without a hat during the run. This production was seen by fifteen thousand people.

Minna Schneier directed *The Diary of Anne Frank* with a young Danish girl, Bodil Brink, in the title role and Victor Lucas as her father, Otto. It also played to capacity, and had all Johannesburg talking about the power and poignancy of the play, a dramatised version of the diary kept by the Jewish thirteen-year-old while in hiding from the Nazis.

In January, Leonard had directed the play with Felicity Bosman and Joss Ackland in Cape Town, where it had a similarly strong impact. Anne Frank's father survived the war, and Leonard met him shortly afterwards. In 1994, I accompanied Leonard to the Cape Town opening of his production of *Yours Anne*, a music drama based on the diaries and produced to coincide with an Anne Frank Exhibition that toured South Africa. Present that night at the Nico Malan Theatre was Anne Frank's best friend, Hannah Pick-Goslar ('Lisa' in the play), who had been
separated from Anne in Belsen and had miraculously come out of the camp alive. It was an eerie experience listening to her talk of her last conversation with Anne, whose brave spirit has become a modern legend. The 1996 Oscar for Best Documentary was awarded to South African-born filmmaker Jon Blair for *Anne Frank Remembered*.

For their two-hundredth production, the Reps presented *The House by the Lake*, a superior thriller in which Flora Robson had scored a huge success in London. Under Cecil Williams' direction, the West End actress Sonia Dresdel played Flora's role. When the Reps found themselves with a blank in their schedule owing to a cancelled booking, they prevailed on Miss Dresdel to stay on and got another Williams - Clifford - to direct her in Ugo Betti's *The Queen and the Rebels*. Betti's political play, in which revolutionaries mistake a prostitute for a fugitive queen and send her to the scaffold, is a highly theatrical and mannered piece. Miss Dresdel, a highly theatrical and mannered actress, played the role to the hilt, making for a mesmerising evening.

Brian Brooke brought out Dennis Price, well-loved for his portrayal of the suave scoundrel in the film *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, to co-star with Margaret Inglis in Terence Rattigan's *Separate Tables*. The play consists of two separate stories linked by their common setting - an English residential boarding house- and supporting characters. However, the male and female protagonists in each half- a semi-alcoholic writer and his rich and
glamorous estranged wife in the first, and a bogus army major and a plain, shy, spinster in the second - are played by the same actors. Both stars were marvellous with Peggy, particularly, effecting a physical transformation that had the audience gasping.

On 14 May 1957, an enthusiastic opening-night audience at the Brooke laughed, clapped, tapped their feet and cheered The Boy Friend, ushering in a long and highly successful run of this West End hit. Sandy Wilson, who had written the book, lyrics and music while still in his twenties, came out to direct the show, with Shirley Hepburn, June Hern, Ivan Berold, Maureen Adair and Bruce Anderson in the leading roles, gorgeous 1920s sets and costumes by Pamela Lewis and Heather MacDonald Rouse, and a lively piano played by Gertrude Walsh, who also conducted and was augmented by a drummer and a ukulele player. Altogether, the production could easily have held its own in London.

While Sandy was rehearsing his musical, English actress Dulcie Gray was appearing at the Brooke in Noel Coward's South Sea Bubble. The delightful Miss Gray had starred in Sandy's first show, See You Later, in 1951, and the otherwise reserved Wilson made no secret of his delight at seeing her here.

None of these successes, however, was doing much for Show Service. By June, when we were booking for Cecil Williams' production of The Strong Are Lonely at the Library Theatre - very successful, fortunately - and the odd
musical event, I had put a stop to our membership delivery service and, by my standards, had time on my hands. I had read that Maria Callas, the world's supreme diva, was to sing at the Edinburgh Festival in August, and I was much taken with the idea of going to hear her and to experience this most famous of festivals. Given the state of the Show Service coffers, this didn't seem a very realistic idea, but when Werner Seehoff (who had come into Show Service during a trip home, booked for everything and become a close friend) phoned from London and suggested I meet him in Turin from where we would do a motor tour of Italy and France, I decided to fly in the face of caution and spend such money as I had on a holiday in Europe and a trip to Edinburgh.

However, despite the ebb in business, which I hoped (and believed) would be temporary, I couldn't simply disappear and leave everything to my two cashiers. I contacted Ruth Hooper, a remarkably versatile and competent person, who had acted with the Reps before becoming their secretary, and subsequently worked on a freelance basis in whatever capacity needed to be filled-box-office supervisor, personal assistant, publicist. Ruth was available, and happy to take on the responsibility of Show Service for a while.

As in 1951, my departure was clouded by bereavement. On 7 July, my Aunt Edie, my mother's sister, died of a sudden brain haemorrhage, leaving three small children
who my mother would now have to help care for. My mother again insisted that I go away as planned.

In the event, Werner and I were joined by a friend of his, and the three of us turned out to be incompatible travelling companions. By the time we got to Venice, to avert total disaster and to protect our friendship, Werner and I sensibly and amicably decided to part company, and I moved on to tour extensively in Italy, Switzerland and France. The theatre trip with Leonard had taught me the ropes of foreign travel, and my solo month in London had taught me how to make the best of being alone. I happily went my own way and, more happily still, fetched up, unscheduled, in Paris, to find I had coincided with the first ever Theatre of Nations Festival.

What a marvellous bonus this turned out to be. Not only was I able to experience Paris in the sunshine rather than in the grey of winter, but there were riches to be had in the world of music and theatre. I enjoyed a few operas, of which the most memorable was *Lucia di Lammermoor*, in which this difficult role was very well sung by the Romanian soprano Virginia Zeani, whom I had heard in South Africa.

In the theatre, Jose Quintero's production of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* had come from New York, with Fredric March as James Tyrone and Jason Robards Jr as his son Jamie (the part Leon would later play in South Africa). O'Neill had forbidden performance of this long and heavily autobiographical play until twenty-five years after his death, but his wife released the rights to
Quintero before time and the work caused a sensation. I was shattered by its emotional power and very grateful to have seen its first and most famous production.

Another excitement was my first experience of Israel's internationally famous Habimah Theatre, founded in Moscow in 1917 to perform plays in Hebrew. Their work had so impressed Stanislavski that, in 1918, he sent one of his students to direct them in *The Dybbuk*, the most famous play in the Jewish canon. In the mid-1920s the company gave a successful season in Berlin, then toured further afield including to the USA and Palestine. They never returned to Russia, eventually making their permanent home in Tel Aviv. In Paris, the Habimah was celebrating its fortieth anniversary with a revival of *The Dybbuk*.

I was impressed by the occasion rather than the performance itself, which disappointed me with its outmoded style of production and acting. I saw the Habimah many times over the years when this was not the case. They have become Israel's National Theatre and generally tend to live up to their reputation. Edinburgh in mid-summer was displaying the unreliability of the British weather to the full. I arrived to rain and wind, and by the time the opening Tattoo was due to take place in the Castle grounds a scattering of snowflakes had begun to fall. The following morning, I queued (again!), hoping for a return ticket to see John Gielgud in a tiny, uncomfortable fringe theatre. Eventually, tickets were made available to those willing to stand behind a pole or sit on the cold floor.
The chill was soon dispelled in the glow created by Gielgud. This most poetic of classical actors spoke Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man' speech from *As You Like It* with a musicality of voice and a purity of understanding in which he became one with the material. It was magnificent. The cataclysmic news, however, was that Maria Callas had walked out of the Festival. I was devastated, but since I had booked a seat to hear her in Bellini's *La Sonnambula* I went to the opera anyway, resigned to enduring her unknown last-minute replacement. She was an Italian soprano named Renata Scotto who, thanks, to this appearance, became an international star of huge and enduring reputation whose career and fiery personality have spawned many bitchy jokes about her ensuing rivalry with Callas.

Among the several plays I saw was Sartre's *Nekrassov*, starring actor and ballet dancer Robert Helpmann. Also, in the cast was Kerry Jordan. I would one day entertain Helpmann in my home, while Kerry would come to South Africa for Taubie Kushlick and make his home here. On the music side, I heard Victoria de los Angeles in recital, and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra, and saw conductor Otto Klemperer in action. Anna Russell was also appearing in Edinburgh, and we had a great reunion after her show.

It was a wonderful time. I had booked the only available accommodation - a freezing room in the Medical School residence - and enjoyed a week that was like a return
to the carefree informality of student life. There was always a tea urn and a plate of biscuits in the Common Room, where we would congregate late at night to compare notes and wage friendly competition as to who had seen the most events in a day.

From Edinburgh I went to London, very excited at the prospect of a return visit. Once there, I followed my 1952 routine, soaking up everything on offer in the West End and at Stratford. It was a marvellous season, and among the many memorable plays I saw were *Titus Andronicus* with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, *Dead Secret* starring Paul Scofield as Dyson the poisoner, and the revue which made a star of Maggie Smith, *Share My Lettuce*.

John Osborne’s play, *Look Back in Anger*, revived several times since, was still electrifying audiences, and I felt very privileged to see it right at the beginning of the revolution it spawned in the British Theatre. Osborne's anti-hero, Jimmy Porter, gave rise to the sobriquet 'angry young man', and the play's scabrous attack on the British 'establishment' began a movement wherein the genteel drawing-room comedies of yesteryear had to compete with a new, raw drama that reflected the rebellion of a new generation and its disdain for conservative values.

In London, I received a letter from the South African Institute of Race Relations urging me to find artists to appear in South Africa as part of its fund-raising drive. I had seen Michael Flanders and Donald Swann in their hit satirical revue, *At the Drop of a Hat*, and tried to prevail on
them to bring the show to Johannesburg. They asked for references and, confident that it would do the trick, I referred them to Anna Russell and Malcolm Sargent, but to no avail. I wrote to them frequently over the next few years and eventually, after the death of Flanders, Swann gave a few one-man shows here. It was then that he told me he and Michael had been unable to reconcile a season here with their political beliefs, not even in aid of race relations.

Flanders and Swann notwithstanding, it was remarkable how many actors I saw on stage, or met, had either past or future connections with South Africa, and how many would cross my own career path in years to come: Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies (in *The Chalk Garden* with Edith Evans a special thrill); Vivienne Drummond playing in *Look Back in Anger*; Diane Todd, to become a familiar figure on the South African musical stage, in *Kismet*; *Odd Man In* with Muriel Pavlow, who would come here for Pieter Toerien; and Flora Robson, with whom I spent a delightful evening over dinner after I went to *The House by the Lake*.

I returned home stimulated, relaxed, and happy to relieve Ruth Hooper of her responsibilities. I found everything in good order, and was interested in the news that Hugo Keleti, who had closed his popular variety venue, the Plastic Theatre in Northcliff, was to open a new theatre inside Joubert Park. His *Variety Under the Stars* series showcased much local light entertainment talent, held together by compere Bill Brewer. This venture not only brought new business for me but cemented an association
with Hugo from which I learnt a lot about the pitfalls of show business.

Taubie Kushlick called me with the thrilling information that she would be producing and directing *Look Back in Anger* in October. She had hired the Brooke Theatre (Show Service was to take over the booking), and a fine-boned, febrile and talented young British actor named Alan Dobie to play the vitriolic Jimmy Porter. The play was hugely successful, and very controversial, with Johannesburg society reeling under the impact of Jimmy's diatribes and treatment of his women. Alan Dobie was a sensitive and moody young man, anxious about working in Johannesburg at a time when Actors Equity in Britain had begun to express its disapproval of such visits. He was also rather lonely and would turn up at Show Service on most days to lunch with me. We also enjoyed some splendid after-show supper parties given by Taubie and Kushy at their apartment in Grand National Buildings.

A month before Taubie's production, Leonard had directed the play in Cape Town, starring Leon Gluckman as Jimmy Porter. A back injury had cut short Lean's long engagement with the Old Vic Company in London, and he had returned home where he would enter a golden period of achievement.

Soon after my return I had been asked to handle a tour for the Israeli singer, Yaffa Yarkoni. As I had done with Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth, I accompanied her on her travels, this time to the main centres of the Transvaal. She
drew capacity audiences with her programme of Israeli songs and was a joy to work with. Some time after the tour, Yaffa wrote that she had had plastic surgery and enclosed some photos of the result. As well as talented, it now appeared that she had become beautiful.

The last couple of months of what had been a strange year for me, defined by my overseas trip rather than by my career at home, saw African Theatres present a season of ballet recitals by Beryl Grey and Oleg Briansky. A former leading ballerina of the Royal Ballet, Beryl (who, with her doctor husband Sven Svenson, I got to know well on her future visits), was noted for her unusual height and her remarkable lyricism, while the Russian Briansky had a magnetic presence and a dazzling technique. It was ACT's second treat for balletomanes that year, Alexandra Danilova and Frederick Franklin having already been here.

In a different vein, I was invited to Ciro's, the fashionable Johannesburg nightclub, to see the writer, entertainer, fashion designer and satirist, Adam Leslie, in a cabaret act with Joan Blake called, simply, *Adam and Joan*. It was their first venture together, but their complementary talents and personalities soon flowered in tandem in a series of Adam Leslie revues which took the town by storm.

Earlier in the year, Adam Leslie had contributed material to a show called *Sextet*, a revue devised and written by Anthony Farmer with music by Ralph Trehwela. Adam's point number called 'The Ladies of Rosebank' became a classic and was frequently featured again in his
own revues. Also, for *Sextet* (the six were Olive Wright, Olive King, Norma Vorster, Dennis Hale, Jimmy Mentis and Tommy Tucker), Tony and Adam wrote a skit on Show Service called 'Show Disservice', which had audiences rolling in the aisles at their own idiosyncrasies, not to mention my behaviour and that of my cashiers. I took it as a compliment that we were important enough to become the butt of jokes. After the opening night of that revue, Tony and his cast descended the long stair to the main room at Ciro's to be greeted by a standing ovation from the socialites gathered there- always a sure sign the show was a success.

The Company of Three presented the hard-hitting American drama about drug-addiction, *A Hatful of Rain*, with Stuart Brown directing Marjorie Cordon, Ivan Berold and Jenny Gratus. This was at the Library Theatre, where Cecil Williams had scored a *succes d' estime* but failed to draw audiences with Jean-Paul Sartre's double bill, *The Vicious Circle* and *The Respectable Prostitute*. Towards the end of the year, Cecil changed gear completely, bringing out the noted British actor David Kossoff to star in *The World of Sholom Aleichem*. This adaptation of three of Sholom Aleichem’s stories co-starred Sarah Sylvia and Joyce Grant, and the evening oozed with charm and Jewish humour. David returned to work here several times and we became good friends.

The National Theatre year ended with Leonard Schach’s incisive production of *Summer of the*
Seventeenth Doll at the Reps. Written by an Australian, Ray Lawler, this was the first Australian play to achieve international recognition and was enjoyed by audiences everywhere. Marjorie Cordon played the lead and the whole cast made a credible job of their 'outback' characters. I later met Ray Lawler in London through my brother Sam.

For Christmas 1957 Children’s Theatre put on Peter Pan at the Reps with the boyish, attractive Evadne Kohler-Baker in the title role. Anthony Farmer, who directed J.M. Barrie's traditional treat for kids, also designed the sets which were absolutely stunning. His visual imagination went into overdrive to create a truly magic world. Adults and children alike adored the show and yet, unaccountably, it made a loss.

But for sheer spectacle, the undoubted highlight of the year came courtesy of African Consolidated Theatres at His Majesty's. Bernard Delfont's London version of the Folies Bergere, a classy variety show complete with a bevy of leggy beauties, known as 'The Folies Bergere Lovelies', clad (and unclad) in shimmering satin and sequins, was an eyeful much enjoyed by Johannesburg audiences.

I celebrated New Year very much aware that I still hadn’t found the Big Idea with which to move my business forward.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN
NERVES OF STEEL

In 1958 Lean Gluckman decided to abandon his burgeoning international career and come home. It was also the year that African Consolidated Theatres gave us the marvellously exuberant American musical, *The Pajama Game*; Moira Lister stormed the country with her one-woman show; the transcendentally gifted and wildly temperamental concert pianist Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli played in Johannesburg ... and I became an unofficial impresario.

In an interview with *The Star*, Leon said, 'I realised after being back in South Africa for a few days that theatre here is making such rapid strides that this is a country for anyone with ideas. In Britain there is nothing new in the theatre, everything has been done before. Here, it is stimulating and comparatively new.' This was, perhaps, a somewhat cavalier dismissal of the British theatre, which was itself moving towards change, but the point was nevertheless well-taken.

Leon joined forces with Leonard Schach for the fourth time. Their association had begun in 1944 in the South African Navy, where Petty Officer Schach directed newly commissioned sub-Lieutenant Gluckman (and his fellow officer Cecil Williams) in *The Middle Watch* at the Little
JUST THE TICKET!

Theatre. In 1954, Leon played the lead in Leonard's National Theatre production of *The Firstborn*, and on his return from London in late 1957, he was Jimmy Porter for the Cockpit Players.

In January 1958, Leon returned to the Johannesburg stage in Leonard’s production of the American play *Career* at the Reps. *Career* concerns the twenty-year struggle of an aspiring and largely out-of-work actor to become a star. It is fairly gripping stuff for those with a specialist interest, but it failed to draw audiences. This reflected a common syndrome, both here and abroad, of public reluctance to witness the tarnish behind the glitter of show business.

Leon was inundated with work. He directed Anouilh's *Thieves' Carnival* for the Reps with singular success, leading to an extended run. Less successful was Taubie's production of *The Rope Dancers*, in which he co-starred with Lydia Lindeque. A harrowing play about a disabled child, *The Rope Dancers* had impressed on Broadway, and it is salutary to note that the critics here turned on it for its subject matter. Only the Jewish Times, which published an article condemning the general reaction to it, noted that 'Theatre at its best is not an escape from life, but is calculated to make us understand life . . . I most earnestly urge all lovers of the theatre- not the lovers of "entertainment"- to make it a duty to see this play.' Forty years later, alas, the theatre was still suffering from the same lack of interest in the serious.

Leon scored again with his National Theatre
production of School for Scandal which toured the country, and directed Heather Lloyd-Jones in *Romanoff and Juliet* at the Reps. By September, he had been associated with eight plays in eleven months.

Moira Lister had been a great favourite with the public during the Johannesburg Festival, which doubtless encouraged her to bring her one-woman show, *People in Love*, dramatisations of stories by Dorothy Parker. Both script and actress captured the unique American writer's brilliantly caustic wit and penetrating observations to make a highly literate and entertaining show.

Moira and her stage management team, Kevin Maybury and Sven van Zyl, spent many hours in our little office at Show Service sorting out the intricacies and discussing the potential problems of her extensive tour. Handling the booking and acting as advisor to Moira represented a good slice of business, and helped forge our lasting relationship.

In February Show Service was approached by a promoter named Ken Park to book the first overseas tour to be made by England's newest pop star, Tommy Steele. A few days before Steele and his manager, Larry Parnes, were due to dock at Cape Town, Mr Park asked me to advance him the money taken to date on ticket sales so that he could pay Steele's managers. Without this, the tour would be in jeopardy.

Warning bells immediately rang in my head. Hugo Keleti had lectured me on unknown managements.
'Always', he told me in his thick Hungarian accent, 'find out whether the management has sufficient funds in hand to pay the artists before you accept the booking. Theatre, is a business, and the box-office revenue remains the property of the paying public until the show has taken place.'

I made some inquiries and to my absolute astonishment, learnt that Mr Ken Park was a clerk employed by the grocers Fatti's and Moni's. From what I could make out, he had never set foot in a theatre, let alone promoted a concert. I was even more dumbfounded that Steele's managers hadn't bothered to check Park's credentials before signing a contract and setting sail for South Africa with their protege and his band of musicians (The Steelmen).

When challenged, Park confessed that he didn't have a penny to his name, had persuaded a travel agent to advance the boat tickets on credit, and was now in critical difficulties. I decided there was nothing for it but for me to meet the Steele entourage in Cape Town, break the news about Ken Park, and see whether I could save the tour. This struck me as a better alternative to the complicated process of refunding money, losing the public's trust and making a loss at Show Service. So, once again calling on the good offices of Ruth Hooper, I flew to Cape Town to await the mailship.

Without pausing to think of the possible consequences if I failed to find a solution to the Tommy Steele farrago, I decided to emulate Johannesburg's Jimmy Mackenzie in
jacking up the singer's publicity. I planned to close Adderley Street, hire some vintage cars and lay on a ticker-tape parade from the docks to the City Hall, where I hoped I could arrange for Tommy to be welcomed by the Mayor of Cape Town. It was a busy day. I drafted a detailed description of the planned welcome and delivered it to the *Cape Argus* - a rather reckless move, as I hadn't yet discussed the matter with the Town Clerk, whose permission and co-operation were essential. Quite confident of his enthusiasm, I went to see him and explained my plans. He greeted them with an ominous silence, followed by an angry harangue about the havoc I would cause, and a refusal to allow it. When the evening paper came out with details of Tommy's proposed route, the hapless Town Clerk was even more incensed, since he had to capitulate to avoid public anger if the parade were cancelled. Round one to me, but there was still the little matter of Mr Ken Park and his non-existent bank account ... Tommy Steele arrived to a royal welcome, waving to the crowds that lined the route while temporary staff I had hired passed among them handing out advertising flyers that I had had hastily printed. After the parade, I escorted the party to their Camps Bay hotel and told them the horrible truth. To cancel the tour was not an attractive or viable option for anybody and I had come armed with an alternative suggestion: I would step into Ken Park's shoes and manage the tour. They were happy to agree, and thus it was that I became a promoter overnight (although Park's
name was already on the programmes and posters), saved the good name of Show Service, and managed to turn a reasonable profit on the deal - which included buying out Ken Park.

Although not yet the star he thought he was, and would, indeed, soon become, the thatch-haired, buck-toothed Cockney entertainer went down well with South African audiences. Still only eighteen, Tommy had a lot to learn about life, and it was with much reluctance that he performed at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in a concert arranged by the Union of Southern African Artists for the benefit of his 'non-white' fans.

The Ken Park debacle was far from being the only case of its kind. Well over a thousand so-called managements and impresarios came into my office over a period of forty years, some of them living in a fantasy world of their own, others out-and-out shysters trying to turn a fast buck. Either way, I learnt to judge their credibility very quickly from the expression on their faces when I trotted out my little speech about box office takings belonging to the public, and for the most part I avoided disaster. These people firmly believed they could finance a show from the box-office takings, whereas legitimate managements were perfectly happy with the cheque they received from Show Service every Tuesday in respect of the previous week's performances. It remains a mystery I've never solved why overseas managements sign contracts without first checking with the management association here.
I still kept up religiously with sporting events and in May 1958 saw Britain's Preston North End soccer team playing here for the first time. In July I watched France beat Eastern Transvaal at rugby by a narrow margin, and I was at Ellis Park in August when the French trounced South Africa.

The next major event that involved Show Service was the concert tour of pianist Michelangeli. It was his second visit to South Africa, but in the intervening years he had become the major star of the classical recital circuit and had developed a reputation for being exceedingly difficult. He travelled with his own grand piano, which was not only a prohibitively expensive thing to do, but turned his tours into a logistical nightmare for the impresario - in this case Alex Cherniavsky. The pianist had a hot temper, couldn't speak English, and was well-known overseas for failing to appear at the last minute because something had displeased him. We were all a little apprehensive.

Michelangeli 's Johannesburg concert was held at the City Hall, which meant that Show Service was responsible for front-of-house arrangements, and I was there early to ensure that things ran smoothly. Every music-lover in Johannesburg turned up. As the 'House Full' sign appeared in the foyer, so did an agitated Alex, followed by his doll-like wife Ella. Michelangeli, they told me, had indicated that he would not be playing and was about to walk out of the building. Ella pleaded with me to do something ...

Since I knew the City Hall rather better than Signor Michelangeli, the first thing that came to mind was to
just the ticket!

prevent him from leaving by locking all the exit doors. With this quickly accomplished, I went backstage to find an absolutely fuming pianist whose language, despite my lack of Italian, struck me as very colourful.

Although refunds for cancelled shows became quite a frequent occurrence in the 1980s when (as many promoters learned to their cost) overseas artists and musicians suddenly withdrew on the grounds of political conscience, they were rare in 1958. Aside from the hassles involved, I certainly didn’t wish to be the one to break the bad news to the eager concertgoers in the packed City Hall.

I ventured a few choice words of my own to the cause of the problems, and soon there was a multilingual slanging match going on which was perfectly audible to the first few rows of the audience. With an uninhibited use of sign language, I pointed to the stage and indicated to the maestro that he must go and play. I then wrote a dollar sign on the back of an envelope, crossed it out and said 'Finito. Comprendo?' I got a swat across the head for my pains and was told to fuck off. Signor Michelangeli, it seemed, had a few words of English after all.

To my relief, at this point someone who looked like an Italian dignitary materialised. I explained the situation and within ten minutes this anonymous gentleman had calmed the hysterical pianist and got him to shake hands with me. Alex and Ella, who had been looking on in bewilderment and distress, shared my relief as Michelangeli took the stage and commenced playing. The evening was a triumphant
success. I never found out what had occasioned the pianist's outburst, but we shared another handshake and a congratulatory drink after the concert. I came to the opinion, still held, that geniuses do not behave normally, and it's a waste of time to expect it of them.

The next overseas visitor was an absolute pleasure, and I was only too delighted to do whatever I could for her—which, as it turned out, was not much. The great Russian ballerina Tamara Toumanova was in the twilight of her glittering career, which had included some Hollywood films—she portrayed Pavlova, dancing the 'Dying Swan' in *Tonight We Sing*—but was still a beautiful woman and an accomplished dancer.

Toumanova was brought out here by an Egyptian impresario who knew nothing about presenting shows in South Africa and whose main interest lay in making a profit. He opted for the cheapest venues, halls which had no proper wings or stages, or any of the other necessary accoutrements. When the dancer arrived, with her partner Vladimir Ukhtomsky and her mother, she was utterly crushed by the inadequacy of the set-up and the lack of consideration for her comfort. She had nobody to turn to and I became her confidant.

At the City Hall, the unraked auditorium floor, combined with the orchestral concert stage on a rostrum much higher than a theatre stage, resulted in the dancers' feet and lower legs being cut off from view. The staging was a fiasco and the understandable complaints from the public
so numerous that, after a few performances, the balance of the season was cancelled. To comfort Tamara in her disappointment, I took her to the Game Reserve for a few days and left her with at least one good memory of South Africa. When I was in Los Angeles a couple of years later, she entertained me to dinner at her Bel Air Mansion, and we continued to correspond for many years.

The 'Oh, Mine Papa' trumpeter, Eddie Calvert, came to Johannesburg, and African Consolidated Theatres brought the Vie Oliver Show and The Royal Danish Ballet. ACT and the public were rather let down by the Danish Ballet who were supposed to be a company of seventy dancers. Only a dozen arrived, but the standard was excellent and went some way to compensating for the disappointment.

But the year's best offering from ACT was *The Pajama Game*. This hit musical had marked the Broadway choreographic debut of Bob Fosse, whose magic touch was evident in the staging of the dance numbers. In the company was a young English actor named Michael McGovern, who stayed on to become one of our leading actors, chalking up a list of tremendous performances for all the major directors over the years.

There was much activity, too, in the local theatre. Margaret Inglis (who had spent the previous eighteen months playing and directing for the National Theatre) starred in *Janus*, a frothy comedy at the Brooke Theatre, directed by Brian. In this play, Peggy renewed her professional relationship with Gordon Mulholland whom
she had directed in *The Philadelphia Story* for the Munro-Inglis Company thirteen years earlier. Since then, Gordon had become a well-known radio and variety artist, and *Janus* marked his return to the straight theatre. Anthony Farmer, who would soon make good a long-time threat to write a musical, designed the sets.

At Ciro's, Mercedes Molina and Enriques Segovia (born Geoffrey Niemann) appeared with a small company that was the forerunner to the Mercedes Molina Spanish Dance Theatre, and at the Brooke Theatre, Brian had a hit with *Grab Me a Gondola*, a marvellously funny and tuneful British musical that sent up the Venice Film Festival and its posturing film personalities. It co-starred Joan Blake and Sergio Calli. Children's Theatre had a very full year, which included an evening of readings by actor and academic David Horner.

In September 1958, articles appeared in the local press about the flowering of indigenous theatre - four locally written shows were playing simultaneously. Cecil Wightman had adapted his popular radio show, *Snoektown Calling* into a stage entertainment; Anthony Farmer had written *Ever Since Eve*; an anonymous author, later revealed as *Rand Daily Mail* theatre critic Lewis Sowden, wrote *The Kimberley Train*, a play which exposed the racist attitudes of South African society; and Athol Fugard's first major play, *No-Good Friday*, was staged.

Tony Farmer's musical, *Ever Since Eve*, garnered rave reviews. He staged it at the YMCA with a cast that included
Olive Wright, Maureen Adair, John Boulter, and newcomer Patrick 'Paddy' O'Byrne, who would win the 'Voice of South Africa' competition a couple of years later and, through radio, would become a household name. The critics considered the show to be sparkling, witty and tuneful and it was a smash-hit for Anthony Farmer Productions (and the Show Service ticket sales).

Directed by Cecil Williams at the Library Theatre, *The Kimberley Train* focused on the problems of a young man who wants to marry his father's secretary, a coloured girl passing for white, and their involvement with an underground organisation known as 'The Kimberley Train'. In retrospect, it was not a particularly well-written piece of drama and was shortly superseded by Basil Warner's *Try For White*, but Lewis Sowden had braved the system to lay bare the ramifications of South Africa's racial laws and expose their injustice. The play ran to packed houses for nine weeks.

I went to the first performance of *No-Good Friday*, presented at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in conjunction with the Union of Southern African Artists. Athol appeared in the play together with his black cast - Bloke Modisane, Dan Poho, Steve Moloi, Ken Gampu, Gladys Sibisa and Zakes Mokae.

Athol, whom I only really got to know a couple of years later when he became a regular at the Chesa Coffee Bar opposite Show Service's Jeppe Street premises, has tagged *No-Good Friday* and his second play, *Nongogo*, his
'apprenticeship' plays. Apprentice or no, *No-Good Friday* made a terrific impact on its audience and later transferred to the Brooke Theatre for a 'whites only' run.

Bernard Sachs, writing in *Personalities and Places* in 1959, said, 'When I left the theatre after seeing *No-Good Friday*, I felt that here was a new direction in South African artistic creativity. Athol has got all it takes, and it is my bet that before the passage of many years a play by him will receive acclaim well beyond the borders of South Africa.' Prescient words. Fugard is recognised as the authentic voice of South Africa and a major twentieth century playwright.

From a purely business point of view, not to mention my personal sense of satisfaction, October 1958 represents a very special date in my career: The Reps finally abandoned the logistical and financial battles of trying to run their own booking in the midst of department-store hustle and bustle at the Belfast, and handed their box-office to Show Service. This, along with the Brooke Theatre and - high ambition, indeed - African Consolidated Theatres, was where I had set my sights for four years. It was one down and two to go.
Hectic, exhausting, challenging, stimulating. These words spring to mind when I look back at 1959 and 1960. Although we were still dogged by a shortage of venues, theatre in all its forms grew beyond recognition, both in the variety of what was on offer and in improved standards.

At the end of 1960, Leon Bennett, writing in the *Sunday Times*, acknowledged this growth, pointing out that a six-week run, once considered a record, was now more likely to be a six-month run. Capacity attendance for a local live show in 1955 had been around the four thousand mark; by 1960 this had grown to as many as fifty thousand on occasion. Theatre was no longer an occupation for the part-timer; a sizeable colony of actors, producers, directors, designers and technicians were making a decent living.

I was quoted in that feature, remarking that the increased popularity of theatre also applied to music and cabaret, and that hardly a week went by without one overseas performer or another arriving in South Africa. Show Service had increased its staff to six in addition to myself, and we were no longer able to complain of being idle. I had my finger firmly on the pulse of the business, and the figures that formed the basis of the statistics.
Tennis began to feature strongly as popular entertainment in 1959. South Africa's first professional exhibition tournament had taken place in 1946 and its second, after an interval of nine years, in 1955 when the tour was headed by the legendary Pancho Gonzales, then reigning Wimbledon champion Tony Trabert, and Frank Sedgeman, reputed to be the world’s fastest player at the time. Two years later the mastermind behind professional tennis, Jack Kramer, came with Pancho Segura and the great Australians Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall.

In 1959, former South African doubles champion Owen Williams, set to become one of the leading promoters and administrators in world tennis, promoted his first tennis tour and asked Show Service to handle the bookings for the Johannesburg leg at Ellis Park. This was still exhibition tennis, and those displaying their skills were Rosewall, Segura, American Mervyn Rose, and 1958 Wimbledon champion Mal Anderson. As a tennis fanatic, who enjoyed both playing and watching the game, I was delighted with this contract which would add a major and exciting component to my work throughout the Sixties and Seventies.

The beginning of 1959 saw the continuing success of Adam Leslie's smash-hit revue, *Let Your Hair Down*, which had opened as the old year drew to its close. Staged at the Intimate Theatre (formerly the YMCA), the show starred its
creator with Joan Blake, Hilda Kriseman, visiting American Eric Micklewood, and a miniature three-girl chorus who were given their fair share of satire and provided the mesh-stocking-and-feathers glamour. Adam aimed his affectionately poisonous darts firmly at the Northern suburbs, repeating 'The Ladies of Rosebank' for his new audience, and cocking a snook at the 'kugel' set with 'Friday Night is Bioscope Night in Jo'burg (... and Saturday night's the night we go to the club!). There were a few barbs reserved, too, for the Nationalist government, but they were mild enough neither to discomfit the privileged audience nor to cause concern in the thought police.

An article by columnist Molly Reinhardt in the *Sunday Times* in January gave details of the impending arrival in Johannesburg of Leonard Schach's Cockpit Players with a lengthy season comprising four of their recent Cape Town successes. This ambitious, innovatory entrepreneurship aroused enormous interest in the press (as well as the public). A February article called Leonard the 'Four-Play Man', and pointed out that at a certain moment his company would be staging plays in three cities simultaneously - a record. And in March, Percy Blakeney (a pseudonym for Baneshik) headlined a piece in the *Sunday Express* 'Schach Troops Move In'. The logistics for Show Service were extremely intricate, and we were in danger of running out of shelf space to hold the multitude of ticket books. A discussion with Leonard, however, revealed that our problems were as nothing compared to his own in
keeping three companies of actors, plus sets and stage management staff on the road.

Leonard’s ambitious undertaking certainly paid off. The first production was *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, directed and acted with an attention to the truth that made the evening as gripping as when I had seen it in Paris in 1957.

Next, Basil Warner’s *Try for White* took the daring step of opening at the Pretoria Opera House before moving to the Intimate for a highly successful run. Only the second play to deal with crossing the colour line, it centres on Jane Matthews, a pale-complexioned coloured dressmaker (Marjorie Gordon) who passes herself off as white and brings up her son (Nigel Hawthorne) accordingly. When a jealous friend in the know (Zoe Randall) reveals the truth to Jane’s white bus-conductor boyfriend (Michael Turner), violence erupts and lives are destroyed. The play, which also featured Joyce Grant and Fiona Fraser (replacing Minna Mills ten and Heather Lloyd-Jones respectively, from the Cape Town cast), managed to entertain and shock simultaneously.

Well-constructed and beautifully directed and acted, it revealed the monstrous implications of the 1950 race classification laws and gave another temporary prick to white conscience. This production brought an invitation, the first ever to a South African company, to play at the 1961 Theatre of Nations Festival in Paris, but, regrettably, when South Africa left the Commonwealth, the invitation
After *Long Day's Journey*, Leon Gluckman and John McElvey went straight into *Inherit the Wind*, for which Leonard had hired the Brooke Theatre. This prizewinning play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee is an enthralling courtroom drama based on the famous Scopes 'Monkey' trial in America in which a schoolteacher was tried for the criminal offence of teaching the theory of evolution. It was a timely play for South Africa, a subtle warning against a Calvinistic grip on men's minds, and another success.

The fourth Cockpit production saw a complete change of pace with Thornton Wilder's lively period-New York comedy, *The Matchmaker*. This hardy perennial, in which Marjorie Gordon played Dolly Levi, supported by John McKelvey, Nigel Hawthorne, Michael McGovern, Robert Haber and Heather Lloyd-Jones, became the musical *Hello, Dolly!*.

Meanwhile, Leonard's Cape Town company at the Hofmeyr was doing *The Chalk Garden*, in which I'd seen Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies in London. In those days, rights to plays were issued separately to managements in different provinces, and Johannesburg saw *The Chalk Garden* in a different production presented by Brian.

Though it seemed that Leonard Schach had commandeered the Johannesburg theatre lock, stock, and barrel, a great deal else was going on. In March 1959, Taubie Kushlick and Leon Gluckman announced that they
were to go into partnership as a production company. It was an unexpected alliance of two polar opposites in temperament, and was to last only a few short years. What they had in common, of course, was an all-consuming passion for the theatre which, in Taubie's case, led to some quite extraordinary behaviour. She lived every second of every performance of her productions, and saw nothing unusual about giving notes to the cast after the final performance.

Kushlick-Gluckman's first production was a musical version of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Directed by Leon, with Taubie typecast as Lady Bracknell, *Half in Earnest* opened to good notices in April. Gordon Mulholland and Olive King were Jack Worthing and Gwendolyn, with June Hern and Michael McGovern as Cecily and Algernon.

The Bantu Men's Social Centre in Eloff Street Extension, adjacent to Dorkay House (the headquarters and rehearsal rooms of Union Artists), was the scene of a farewell concert for Father Trevor Huddleston on 24 February 1959. I was present at what was a sad event for the thousands of township people who loved Huddleston, but this brave and compassionate priest could no longer function within the apartheid system. The concert was an extraordinary occasion. Over two thousand people crammed into the 800-seat hall, and the crowds outside were so dense that several artists due to appear were unable to get through. Every black entertainer wanted to be part of
JUST THE TICKET!

this programme, and the concert finished at two in the morning.

White audiences enjoyed another of Alfred Herbert's African Jazz seasons, but were disturbed by the Reps production in March of *Hot Summer Night*. It dealt with the marriage of a white girl to a Jamaican (played by John Rutherford in blackface make-up) and caused quite a controversy. In April, the Reps staged *Affairs of State*, the play I had asked Leon to direct in 1954. It was so successful that the run was extended, and I was pleased to see my opinion confirmed.

Hugh Goldie, by then the resident director at the Reps, staged Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood*. In the cast was a young and very talented actor named David Beattie who was taken desperately ill during rehearsals and had to be sent home to Cape Town to recuperate. David never regained full health and died of cancer in 1962, having made his final appearance for Leonard Schach in the satirical revue, *Beyond the Fringe*. His tragic loss was a blow to the theatre community, who continued to remember him with affection.

My adored Anna Russell returned to South Africa in March to tour the major centres and Rhodesia, fulfilling a contract I had personally instigated, brokered and signed after her 1956 visit. I was unable to get away for the full period and found suitable people to take care of her in Cape Town and Durban, but I travelled with her in a managerial capacity for the rest of the tour. I enjoyed every minute of it.
Anna repeated her version of Wagner's Ring Cycle, the great success of her 1956 Johannesburg Festival season. In Salisbury (later Harare) we invited the chief dignitaries of the Federation countries to attend a performance. They filed in with due regard to protocol, watched through a peephole by an amazed Anna. She immediately changed her intended programme and launched into a take-off of the Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire, which made fun of officialdom. The humour of the situation unfroze the stiff-upper-lipped guests, who accorded Miss Russell a standing ovation.

Leon Gluckman directed Shaw's *Saint Joan* for the National Theatre, having chosen his Joan through auditions. She proved a disaster in rehearsal, and was replaced by the fine Afrikaans actress, Kita Redelinghuys, playing opposite Siegfried Mynhardt's Dauphin. And for Kushlick-Gluckman, Leon directed John Mortimer's double bill, *What Shall We Tell Caroline?* and *The Dock Brief*. 

Bertha Egnos staged *Bo Jungle* in association with African Theatres at the Empire, Adam Leslie joined forces with Anthony Farmer and composer Ralph Trewhela to create *I Spy*, another satirical revue which kept the town in stitches, and Athol Fugard's second 'apprenticeship' play, *Nongogo* made its first appearance. A full schedule of fifteen productions from the National Theatre included Bartho Smit's *Moeder Hanna*, a key work in Afrikaans drama, a revival of *Waiting for Godot*, and James Ambrose Brown's *Seven Against the Sun*. This was later filmed by David
Taubie Kushlick came back from a New York trip triumphantly brandishing the rights to The Marriage-Go-Round which she had seen on Broadway. She invited me to her flat to read the script, and while I was doing so Leon arrived, also at Taubie’s behest. She proceeded to act out the play, indicating exactly how she proposed to direct it. I was transfixed by the energetic one-woman show she gave us in her living room. The real thing opened at the Intimate Theatre in September, with Gordon Mulholland, Fiona Fraser and Peggy Moran.

*The Marriage-Go-Round* is a comedy about two charming pedagogues, happily married to each other and to their academic careers until their ivory tower is invaded by a gorgeous, free-thinking Swedish girl come to persuade the handsome professor to co-operate with her in producing the perfect child. The notices were definitely cool, if not actually frigid, and after the first performances had played to poor houses, Taubie summoned me and Leon to discuss closing the production.

However, bookings showed faint signs of picking up, and the house manager told me that audiences, though small, appeared to be loving the show. I urged Taubie to hold fire a little longer, and within ten days the play went into orbit to become a commercial winner that wiped out all Taubie and Lean’s recent box-office losses.

The play was not only sexy for its time, but very definitely risqué - Peggy Moran actually pranced about IN A
TOWEL! (Nowadays, they don't bother with the towel). At the end of the run, *The Marriage-Go Round* toured the country with equal success, and played another season in Johannesburg on its return. During the run customers often asked me how far the seats were from the 'screen'. When I told Taubie this, she took it as an indication that the play was attracting first-time theatregoers who didn't know the word 'stage', and I think she was probably right.

In any event, it was one of Taubie's biggest successes of the decade. Twenty-six years later, Pieter Toerien enjoyed a similar success when he revived the play with Gordon Mulholland again playing the lead, opposite a former Miss World, Anneline Kriel.

At the Brooke Theatre we saw British actor Ian Hunter guest-starring opposite Margaret Inglis in *The Grass is Greener*, Peter Shaffer's *Five Finger Exercise* guest-starring Emlyn Williams' son, Brook, and a trio of hits for Heather Lloyd-Jones - *Champagne Complex*, *The Moon is Blue* (both comedies) and *Two for the Seesaw*, a comedy-drama, as poignant as it is funny.

The annual crisis that appeared to be developing as part and parcel of my business came in July when African Consolidated Theatres brought Antonio and his Spanish Dance Company to the Empire. Early in the virtually sold-out season, an electrical fault caused a fire to break out at the theatre - thankfully, after the performance.

I learnt of this disaster when I was awakened by a persistent ringing of my doorbell at two o'clock in the
morning. I staggered up to find ACT's Jim Stodel on the doorstep, accompanied by the diminutive Spanish dance star himself. While I made coffee, they told me what had happened, and that they had already contacted Wits University about transferring the show to the Great Hall.

The purpose of their visit at this ungodly hour was to ask me to sell them ticket books for the Great Hall. By then, Show Service had taken over the ordering and printing of ticket books for all the venues we handled, and we generally kept a six-month supply. Jim and Antonio wanted three-weeks, worth of tickets so that they could re-open the booking immediately. They had rung the family home in Benoni at 1.30 a.m. to get my address, further convincing my father that I had chosen to work among lunatics. As I dressed to take them to Show Service at 3 a.m., I began to wonder whether my father wasn't right.

I didn't envy Stodel the task of transferring his Empire bookings to the much smaller Great Hall, though I couldn't help reflecting that if he had given me ACT's business in the first place, his task would have been a lot easier. In selling him the ticket books, I made one proviso: Jim must organise the transfer of my personal tickets so that I wouldn't have to join the public at the Empire box-office. Jim assured me this would be taken care of. Days went by without a word from ACT and my messages to Stodel remained unanswered. Finally, there was nothing for it: In order to see the great Spanish legend, I went down to the Empire where, just as in the old days, I queued up for
Percy Tucker

several hours.

For the Christmas holidays Children's Theatre, in conjunction with the National and the Reps, did The Glass Slipper, a musical version of Cinderella in which Hilda Kriseman and Olive King stole the show as the Ugly Sisters. Audiences adored the special effects and the gadgetry - which included a grandfather clock through the door of which the Fairy Godmother (Anne Ziegler) made her entrance- or should have done. On opening night, the door stuck fast and there was much confusion and improvisation as Anne tried to force her way out. The word of mouth on this show was tremendous. As the demand for seats grew, I met with the Reps to suggest that they do two shows a day whenever possible. They acted on this advice, and the production brought in a lot of sorely needed income for the managements.

In a year jam-packed with interesting, entertaining and even remarkable contributions from several people, everything was overshadowed by one towering achievement that was not only superlative entertainment of the highest quality, but a milestone in South African theatre. It was also a lasting testament to the vision and commitment of Leon Gluckman.

It was called King Kong.
The genesis of the first, and arguably the best, African music drama is to be found in a history of events and a consensus of ideals (and ideas) that coalesced at the right time. In the 1930s African jazz had flowered in the townships to become an important feature in the lives of urban Africans. Some remarkable talents emerged, acquiring a huge following among their own people, but remaining largely unknown to whites.

When Father Trevor Huddleston was seeking to raise funds to build an Olympic-sized swimming pool for his flock in Orlando in 1953, he enlisted the help of John Bolon. The outcome was the staging of a concert at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre, given by black entertainers. Names well-known in the townships - Dolly Rathebe, the Manhattan Brothers and others - featured in the programme, and an unknown young composer named Todd Matshikiza wrote a choral overture dedicated to Father Huddleston.

The handful of whites in the packed hall, an influential group, responded strongly to the event, and voiced the feeling that these gifted performers should be more widely seen and heard. At about this time, businessman Ian Bernhardt had helped to stage South Africa’s first all-black
Shakespeare production, *The Comedy of Errors*. Bolon called a meeting of black entertainers to which some three hundred people came, and the Union of Southern African Artists was born, with Bernhardt soon leaving the commercial world to run it full time.

The Union functioned as educator, promoter and protector of black artists, and in 1956 the indefatigable Alfred Herbert launched the first of his 'Township Jazz' concerts at the City Hall, familiarising ecstatic white audiences with the Manhattan Brothers, Sonny Pillay, Lemmy Special, Kiepie Moketsi, and a host of other gifted musicians.

Also in 1953, Leon Gluckman, who felt strongly that black and white would have a great deal to give each other if only they were free to do so, talked about the cultural cost of apartheid in a press interview. 'The audience potential is cut to ribbons,' he said. 'If it were not so tragic, it would be ludicrous. It is difficult to exist spiritually in a country where the basic equality of all human beings is not recognised.'

In 1958 lawyer and writer Harry Bloom accompanied Ian Bernhardt one evening to listen to some new black singing groups at the Salvation Army school in the Eastern townships. As Leon recounted it to me, Harry Bloom was enthralled by these young performers. Like Bernhardt, he felt the time was ripe to develop black potential in vehicles more substantial than concerts. He conceived the idea of developing a jazz opera and set about looking for a suitable
Just the ticket!

story that would embody the unique flavour of township life through music and drama. When he read reports of the death of Ezekiel Dhlamini he knew he had found his subject.

Dhlamini was a champion boxer, a township hero with gangland associations, who lost his grip and became a fallen idol. Having killed a gang leader with his bare fists, he subsequently murdered his girlfriend in a fit of jealous rage and was sentenced to twelve years’ hard labour. Shortly afterwards, he committed suicide, drowning himself in the dam near Leeuwkop Prison.

The life and death of Ezekiel Dhlamini had everything that Harry was looking for: the vibrancy of township life, its glamour and its squalor, laughter and tears, and the dark underside of tragedy. He discussed the idea with Ian, who suggested Todd Matshikiza as a possible composer. Matshikiza accepted, and was joined by lyricist Pat Williams, while artist Arthur Goldreich came on board to design the 'Sophiatown' sets and costumes. (Goldreich would later be detained for his political activities and, with lawyer Harold Wolpe, would escape into exile). Bloom moved to Cape Town and worked on the book from there.

Leon Gluckman was approached to direct the show, now titled King Kong, and had no hesitation in accepting this challenging opportunity to further the cause of black theatre. That he was contracted to play two enormous roles in Cape Town for Leonard Schach in two major plays - Inherit the Wind and Long Day’s Journey into Night- didn't
deter him from throwing himself heart and soul into the project.

A musical director was urgently needed, as was a choreographer who could harness the cast's infinite but untrained talent for dance. Lean's old friend Stanley (Spike) Glasser, then completing his post-graduate music studies at Cambridge, was delighted to accept the post of musical director; Arnold Dover joined the team as choreographer.

In due course the government would crush the principles of academic freedom in its ever-tightening vice, but at the time of King Kong the Wits University Great Hall was still protected by its charter and was open to non-segregated audiences. Union Artists secured a booking at the Great Hall for February 1959, and Leon held auditions to select his massive cast of sixty-three singing actors before leaving to fulfil his engagement with Leonard in Cape Town. Rehearsals began in November in an empty warehouse in Loveday Street South, which quickly became known as the 'Dungeon'.

Working with Leon Gluckman and Ian Bernhardt on this first all-black musical was one of the most interesting and exciting periods of my life. Whenever I could get away from Show Service, I cast off my 'managing director' mantle and scurried off to the Dungeon to help the creative team in any way I could. Sometimes I advised on budgetary matters - the show was budgeted at seven thousand pounds, astronomical at the time, yet a shoestring sum for a production of this size. I offered advice in respect of ticket
prices and sales and helped with publicity, but also on occasion found myself shunted back to my youth as, broom in hand, I swept the concrete floor of the Dungeon or organised coffee for sixty people.

In between chores, I enjoyed the privilege of watching Leon, Arnold Dover and Spike Glasser at work. Arnold had worked on a film with Africans and was well-prepared for their improvisatory spontaneity. Lean instinctively understood how to control his ebullient and sometimes unruly company, making demands on them without resorting to any of the trappings of authority which attached to his status and his skin colour. His manner won him unanimous respect and affection.

Three months was a dangerously short time in which to perfect a show of this scale, especially with artists who, however talented, were untrained and inexperienced. Indeed, many of them had never seen a stage, let alone performed on one. Lean often remarked to me afterwards that the inadequate amount of time at his disposal had been a blessing in disguise, since the heavy pressure allowed him no time to realise that he was attempting the impossible.

Most of the cast had to work at their jobs by day and rehearse at night. Transport was difficult and many of the company had no concept of timekeeping or the necessity for it. Each night a specially hired bus carried home those who lived in the Western townships, while a roster of volunteer drivers (of whom I was one) took back others who
lived in the suburbs. It was a bizarre situation: cooks, nannies, gardeners, messengers and delivery 'boys' by day became equals of the white production team at night and were then delivered back to servants' quarters. I was much affected by this anomaly and could only guess at how the people concerned coped with their schizophrenic existence.

Late at night, when the cast had left, Lean, Spike and Arnold would lock the Dungeon doors and remain behind until the small hours, preparing the following day's work. It was a punishing regimen. During rehearsals, the Dungeon was crowded to bursting, serving as workshop and 'stage' for sixty-three actors and a fourteen-piece jazz orchestra. One of those musicians was trumpeter Hugh Masekela, who later went into exile, became famous overseas, and returned to post-apartheid South Africa where he became the deputy director of PACT.

The lead role of 'The Champ' or King Kong, the Dhlamini figure, was entrusted to Nathan Mdledle, one of the popular Manhattan Brothers, and a man of fine physique as well as voice. Band vocalist Miriam Makeba was cast as Joyce, the Shebeen Queen and object of King's affections. Joe Mogotsi was Lucky the gang leader, and Peggy Phango played the second female lead, coincidentally named Miriam. They were a formidable quartet.

Nathan played the role again in London and remained there permanently. Miriam became a huge star in America
and Europe, and a loud voice in the anti-apartheid movement abroad. After marrying and divorcing Sonny Pillay, then Hugh Masekela, she became the wife of the black American activist Stokely Carmichael. Joe played Lucky again in London, then returned to South Africa where he excelled himself as The Emperor Jones for Leon and Union Artists, and Peggy took over the role of Joyce for the London production. She, too, opted for a career in England but another cast member who went to London, Abigail Kubeka, was still a shining star in South Africa in the 1990s.

After three months of exhaustive, and exhausting, preparation, *King Kong* opened on 2 February 1959 to a packed house at the University Great Hall. I escorted *Sunday Times* columnist Molly Reinhardt to the opening, a glittering social occasion, and we went backstage before the show to wish Leon and the cast good luck. A cloud of nervous tension hovered in the air, not lessened by the fact that Miriam Makeba was suffering from a badly sprained ankle. Molly and I took our seats, and as the overture began, I realised that I, too, was suffering from butterflies.

To describe the evening as a sensation is totally inadequate. Music, sets, lights, costumes and performances - all were of the highest order. The stage of the Great Hall exploded into life. Arthur Goldreich’s designs, simple, linear and brightly coloured, immediately captured the atmosphere of the township. The energy of the cast was
electric, the music alternately seductive, exhilarating and haunting. The final curtain fell to an ovation rarely heard at a Johannesburg first night for a locally produced show, and I lost count of the curtain calls. The roars grew louder as Leon Gluckman finally appeared on the stage. Obviously exhausted, he stood for a moment then, turning his back to the audience, bowed low to his sixty-three actors. It was one of the great and memorable nights in the history of the South African theatre, and all those who had made it possible were rewarded with a monumental hit.

Leon had met the challenge. He had taken raw talent and, in record time, moulded a professional ensemble with a style that would not have been out of place on Broadway. Veteran theatregoers ran out of adjectives; the critics were lavish in their praise.

Oliver Walker of *The Star* considered the show his 'greatest thrill in twenty years of South African theatregoing' and noted that, 'the abounding vitality from the players would have meant nothing without the glitter and polish of Leon Gluckman's direction'. The *Sunday Express* told its readers, 'There is such boundless vitality in all the acting, the dancing and the mime that you will want to leap from your seats'. And, nodding in the direction of harsh reality, the *Express* added, 'Defy the law and join in'.

The African paper, *The Golden City Post*, recognised that the show was 'A milestone in the history of non-white entertainment'.

It is impossible to overstate either the impact or the
significance of *King Kong* in apartheid South Africa of the period. It gave dignity to the black population of the country and brought recognition of black talent. For white theatregoers it was an eye-opener, and for the theatre itself, a triumphant vindication of the efforts to promote its development and widen its horizons.

Six years of hard effort by Union Artists had opened the way for black theatre and encouraged white theatre to become the conscience of the country through the work of Athol Fugard and others. The fruits would be a long time coming, but the seeds had been planted.

Ironically, the success of the show coincided with a recognition on the part of the Afrikaner intelligentsia that the state of Afrikaans theatre left a lot to be desired. *Die Vaderland* speculated on the possible causes of cultural malaise among Afrikaners, who were failing to write novels or original plays and whose theatre attendance had become alarmingly low. Writing about *King Kong* in *Die Burger*, Klaas Steytler warned his readers, 'It is wise to take thorough note of this production and to read its implications.'

In answer to these and other articles, Frank Burger wrote a long feature in the Port Elizabeth *Evening Post* in which he concluded that, 'Afrikaans theatre ... began to grow thinner in content with the acceptance of apartheid as a policy of national salvation . . . Apartheid demanded the silencing of the Afrikaner intellect and the blunting of his moral sensibilities.'
King Kong was the biggest hit Show Service had ever handled. Public response was huge and immediate, and queues stretched for blocks from our office to beyond the Jeppe Street Post Office. My elation at this success was tempered by the enormous problems I faced in supplying tickets to an eager and demanding public. I had four cashiers working exclusively on the show, non-stop from 7 a.m. till 6 p.m. The pressure was intolerable, and I had no choice but to take the phones off the hook. I calculated that, provided we could confine each transaction to two minutes, we could serve a thousand people a day. I devised a system whereby I walked up and down the queue, giving people a numbered slip of paper with a day and a time when they should come back. Without this 'system', we would have had people lining the streets for days.

For the first time I was dealing with a multi-racial public, and I realised how large a potential audience was out there if only they were free to attend the theatre, and how healthy this would be for the livelihood of the profession and the managements. I would argue this case in 1977 as part of the team that made representation to the Cabinet to lift racial discrimination in theatres.

The popularity I had acquired during Fonteyn's visit three years earlier now reached record heights. Bribes and incentives came my way in many inventive guises, and I was thankful that few people had my phone number. My poor mother in Benoni, however, was besieged with callers
claiming to be my best friend or a VIP. - or the best friend of a VIP.

An unwelcome view of human nature was revealed by those white customers who came to the box office and said, 'Of course I'm not a racist, and I've got nothing against them, but I really don't want to sit next to a black person.' In these cases, I made sure whenever possible that they would be sitting next to a black person. I hoped that our little exercise in deception would improve race relations.

Within a week, the entire five-week run of *King Kong* was sold out. If there had been an available venue, the demand for seats could have kept it going indefinitely.

Leon was under tremendous stress and had no time to savour the success of the show. On 9 February, exactly a week after the opening, he was on stage at the Intimate Theatre, along with John McKelvey, Joan Blake and Nigel Hawthorne, for the Johannesburg run of *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Meanwhile, the Pretoria City Council and the Aula Theatre at Pretoria University were adamant in their refusal of Union Artist’s application to present the show in the administrative capital. Editorials protesting this appeared in the Pretoria News, but the Council remained obdurate, with their spokesman asserting that he 'couldn't care less'. Before touring to Cape Town in April, the show returned to Wits for a week, during which Miriam Makeba was rushed to hospital with a gynaecological emergency. Abigail
Kubeka replaced her, but Miriam returned for the Cape Town season.

Word on *King Kong* had travelled. For the first time ever, American and British producers flew out to take a look at a South African show, rather than the other way around. In April, the influential London impresario Jack Hylton sent his right-hand man, Hugh Charles, to negotiate for a London production. I had dinner with Hugh and was tickled to discover that he was the composer of 'We'll Meet Again' and 'There'll Always Be an England'.

In February 1960, Leon went to London to finalise arrangements for the West End production. Not knowing whether the government would grant passports to his company, he took the precaution of auditioning black artists of every possible origin who were resident in London. In August the government gave the go-ahead- an unexpected precedent.

In November, excerpts from the show were performed at a boys' club hall in a Pretoria township, with Peggy Phango as Joyce. She would play the role in London as Miriam Makeba was already in New York, earning a reputed three thousand dollars a week.

Leon announced that the show would be revised for the benefit of English audiences. The book was to be partially rewritten, new production numbers added and some traditional costumes incorporated. The cast would be sent for classes in speech training and deportment. The result would be seen in a three-week Johannesburg run to open at
the Great Hall on 9 January 1961.

By the time the company left for London, 200 000 South Africans all over the country had seen King Kong. Two-thirds of them were white. I was at the airport on 7 February 1961 when the cast departed. Most of them had never been in an aeroplane. When the flight was announced, a sudden hush fell over the departure lounge. In the silence that followed, the cast spontaneously sang 'Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika'. It was a historic, unique and emotional interlude.

On 23 February 1961, two years and three weeks to the day since its momentous first night, King Kong opened at the Princes Theatre, London, having played a special Royal Command Performance for Princess Margaret the previous night.

The London reviews were favourable and a few were glowing, but ecstatic raves were missing. The public loved it, but only until September, and - a major disappointment to all concerned - the proposed Broadway season fell through and the company left for home on 7 December. I had attended the gala performance and have to admit that the original impact was missing. Certainly, I thought the theatre far too big and barn-like, and I have always suspected that the tampering to cater for English tastes watered down the magic.

In April 1979, King Kong was revived at His Majesty's. It was an entirely new production, directed by an American, Joe Walker who, with his wife Dorothy, the musical director, had rewritten the book, changed the story and
messed around with the music. To sit there and watch this insulting travesty of the original was a nightmare. It was the only occasion when I rejoiced in a show's failure, for it was, deservedly, an enormous financial flop.

The idea of reviving the original resurfaces periodically. When I was on the committee to choose the programme for the reopening of the Civic Theatre in 1993, *King Kong* was considered an ideal candidate but there were many difficulties and the idea never got off the ground.
Abe Bloomberg was a prominent lawyer and socialite, and one of Cape Town's most successful mayors (he had first held the office during the 1947 Royal visit). The Bloombergs owned 'Uramarah', a magnificent 'country' estate in Constantia. In the grounds was a barn which, suitably decorated, had become a focal point for society gatherings.

Abe's son David, a high-powered commercial lawyer and husband of ballerina Toby Fine, was passionate about the theatre. In the mid-Fifties, with his father's approval, David converted the barn into a theatre called, with unassailable logic, The Barn, where he produced and directed plays. It was a well-appointed, comfortable and intimate venue, seating around two hundred people, and quickly became the place to be seen. Many professionals, from beginners such as Helen Bourne, to more seasoned actors like Yvonne Bryceland, appeared there, with guest directors such as Leonard Schach lending their expertise. Audiences were undeterred by the fact that the plays had often already been done by Leonard or Brian Brooke at the Hofmeyr - especially as the high price of a ticket generally included a dinner of the finest food and wines, served with
great style.

David Bloomberg decided to widen his horizons by presenting tours of international artists and entertainers—distinct from actors. At that time, Alex Cherniavsky and, on a smaller scale Musica Viva, specialised in promoting classical musicians, leaving African Consolidated Theatres the only producer for light entertainers, and other one-off attractions. Thus, the management field in this regard appeared invitingly open.

At the beginning of 1960 David approached me to form a partnership with him, acting as his Johannesburg representative and involving myself in the search, and subsequent arrangements, for suitable entertainers to perform here. I was immediately concerned that there might be a problem of ethics involved: I couldn't possibly contemplate being in competition with Show Service's clients. However, as Show Service did not handle ACT's business, and when it was clear that David and I would not be competing in the same field as Alex or Peta Fisher, I accepted this new challenge.

The venture lasted only a couple of years, finally defeated by several interlocking factors. The major problem was the recurring one of venues, which remained in short supply. This affected the economics of our plans, since to cover overseas artists' fees we required larger auditoriums than were generally available. The apartheid question was beginning to bite overseas, and many top names were only willing to play before multi-racial audiences, so our options
narrowed to sports stadiums or places like the Wembley Ice Rink, which were ill-equipped for artists of major international standing.

Short-lived though it was, my professional association with David Bloomberg bore fruit in numerous ways. We succeeded in presenting several attractions and, in so doing, I was not only schooled in the technicalities of acting as an impresario but laid the ground for a substantial network of overseas contacts that would prove of immense value to the South African entertainment business in years to come. Already our overseas embassies had Show Service listed as the only address, outside of African Theatres, to which foreign agents and managements could write with enquiries.

January saw four opening nights in the space of three days. The most impressive and, alas, least popular, was Leon Gluckman's striking production of *The Emperor Jones* starring Joe Mogotsi and an all-black supporting cast of thirty actors at the Wits Great Hall. Leon had wanted Nelson Mandela to play the lead in Eugene O'Neill's powerful parable, but this idea was knocked on the head by the ongoing Treason Trial in which Mandela was among the 156 accused. Efforts to stage the play in Pretoria, where the trial was being held, met with the usual hostile refusals until Union Artists were offered a tent in the Showgrounds for the purpose. *The Pretoria News* recorded the event in a headline, 'History made in Pretoria'.

The Union Artists' opening on 25 January competed
with the simultaneous opening of the 1960 Coon Carnival whose star attraction was Danny Williams. The first Reps play of the new year, *The Sound of Murder*, opened on 26 January, and Leonard Schach's production of *A Majority of One*, starring Sarah Sylvia and Frank Wise, opened on 28 January. A very busy year was on the cards, and with arrangements now in hand for the first presentation from David Bloomberg, it was necessary for me to address a new problem.

For some time, Show Service had been inundated with pleas to open additional branches for people who were unable to come into the city centre. There were numerous difficulties in the way, and I decided that the best solution would be to franchise a telephone service. The franchisee would telephone the Show Service desk with the customer's requirement and would issue the customer with a voucher exchangeable at the theatre before the performance. The first franchised desks were in stores in Hillbrow and Rosebank.

This bright idea became an ongoing nightmare for all concerned. The customers at Show Service and at the branches were unhappy with the delays caused by the cashiers having to sit on the phone to each other, a laborious procedure that was fraught with errors - the wrong tickets being torn out, for example. Sometimes, in desperation, I would grab the phones, leaning over the cashier who was serving the Eloff Street queue, usually with a different plan in front of her from the one I needed. My
efforts to help my overburdened staff actually added to the chaos. Unbelievably, we continued like this for another eleven years, further compounding the problem when we opened a desk in Pretoria.

By February, however, my staff were left in relative peace and the capable hands of Pat Bray, who had joined Show Service as my second-in-command because I was immersed in my first collaboration with David Bloomberg, the presentation of the American showman-psychiatrist, Dr Murray Banks. He had been engaged at a fee of a hundred pounds per performance (or 'lecture', as Banks called them) which struck us as very fair remuneration.

In those days it was a relatively simple matter to get the co-operation of the airport manager and lay on a VIP welcome for celebrities. I went the whole hog for my first job as an 'impresario'. The press was assembled, and the red carpet literally rolled out on the Jan Smuts Airport tarmac. The passengers disembarked, but there was no sign of the distinguished psychiatrist for whom I was waiting. I made for the arrivals hall, now virtually empty but for a short, fat little man, wearing an obvious toupee. With a sinking heart I approached him. But Dr Murray Banks he was.

His unpromising appearance was soon belied by the force of his personality, the sharpness of his mind, and his extraordinary gifts as an entertainer. He was in every regard a one-off. A fully qualified and experienced psychiatrist with a wonderful sense of humour, he had discovered an
uncanny gift for remembering and telling jokes. This became his favourite occupation and he gave up medicine to become an entertainer, making his name on the comedy circuit at the Jewish resorts in America, and releasing records and books which he manufactured and marketed himself.

The first half of his show consisted of talking about psychological issues in an informative way, but to illustrate every case or condition, he told a joke. In the second half, he invited questions from the audience and, again, his answers always included a joke. They were brilliantly funny, and he had audiences pouring out their intimate problems and appreciating his frank humour, no matter how close to the bone.

It was through records that South African tourists had brought back from the USA that Murray’s name was known here. David and I naturally knew he had a following but we hadn't realised the extent of his popularity, which each performance only served to increase. Charities fought to buy up the first night in each major city. In Johannesburg, the Cotlands Baby Sanctuary won the battle for the opening at the City Hall, which was also Murray’s first show here.

I entered the City Hall with a certain amount of apprehension. I wasn't at all sure how this elegant charity audience would react to material which contained more sexual innuendoes and references than had ever been heard on a South African stage. I needn't have worried. Murray was a consummate artist in getting audiences to eat
out of his hand.

It had fallen to me to travel with him throughout the Transvaal and Rhodesia, while David took care of the Cape Province. The show was a sell-out everywhere, and when he played in Benoni, extra seats had to be added. My father was persuaded to see the show there, and was forced to admit that he enjoyed it. My staying power was tested to the limits by Murray’s livewire energy: dozens of people came backstage nightly and he held court until two in the morning; then it was up early to pursue publicity through countless press and radio interviews, and to organise that night’s selling of his books and records. He had brought the master copies with him and had thousands run off in Johannesburg. I had warned him against this, but had underestimated the doctor, who skilfully and shamelessly plugged the products during the performance, with the result that we faced an avalanche of buyers after the show.

I learnt a great deal from Murray Banks. He was really the first show business person to cash in on merchandising his products here, and he was a real 'pro' when it came to dealing with the press and getting them on his side. He taught me a valuable lesson about radio interviews. He was adamant that he would only broadcast live, explaining that nothing he said could be cut, distorted, or taken out of context if wasn’t on tape to be edited later. He also taught me that the whole purpose of an interview was to plug the show, getting in as many details as possible about dates, venues, prices and where to book. I’ve applied this
principle ever since in handling publicity and am constantly surprised at how often it is ignored by publicists and their clients. It’s such a wasted opportunity not to do this, particularly nowadays with the power of television.

It was in my own best interests to co-operate with Murray’s recipe for success, since David and I had agreed that I would actually buy the Transvaal and Rhodesian seasons, take responsibility for all the arrangements- and pocket the profits. This last possibility stopped looking so good when Murray, in the face of his monumental success, announced that he felt he was being underpaid. Eventually we arranged to schedule some extra shows, from which we would pay him a sufficiently generous share of the take to satisfy him.

In the midst of my involvement with Murray Banks, I had managed a night off to see the Royal Ballet at the Empire. Nadia Nerina and the lovely Russian ballerina Svetlana Beriosova headed the company, which once again included a strong Southern African contingent- Vyvyan Lorraine, Monica Mason, Petrus Bosman, Johaar Mosaval. Rhodesian born Gary Burne, who would later play a significant role as both dancer and choreographer for the PACT and CAPAB companies, was among the lead male dancers, and Beryl Grey came for a few guest appearances, during which time I renewed my acquaintance with her and entertained her to Sunday lunch.

In March, Taubie and Leon announced in the press
that they were going to use their substantial profits from *The Marriage-Go-Round* to finance works of more substance and less obviously commercial appeal. Their blockbusting comedy success had brought new audiences into the theatre, and they hoped these would return for the first of their more off-beat plays, *A Taste of Honey*. Written by Shelagh Delaney, a six-foot-tall ex-usherette from the North of England, it had attracted rave reviews, large audiences and controversy at the Royal Court Theatre in London. It would not repeat this success in South Africa.

The plot of *A Taste of Honey* concerned the pregnant teenage daughter of a Liverpool prostitute. Abandoned by her black lover, she is befriended by an effeminate homosexual. Predictably, the play provoked cries of outrage, with James Ambrose Brown, writing in the *Sunday Times*, one of the few to appreciate the play’s poetry, humour and compassion. It was marvellously directed and acted but didn’t run. Taubie and Leon were distraught.

On 10 March, the Reps Theatre was renamed the Alexander in tribute to its founder and Honorary Life President. This gracious and fitting gesture serves as a permanent monument to a woman who played a vital part in the development of the Johannesburg theatre.

I was present at the occasion, for which Stiemens Street was closed to traffic and the newly named building flood-lit. Chairs were placed in the street and, as well as the Mayor and Mayoress of Johannesburg, Councillor and Mrs Alec Gorshel, the Administrator of the Transvaal, Dr F.H.
Odendaal, was present to perform the opening ceremony. The Governor-General (the country's last, as it turned out), Mr C.R. Swart, unable to attend, sent a long message that was read to the gathering.

Mr Swart concluded with these words: 'It is undoubtedly a well-deserved tribute to your founder ... that your theatre should bear her name, especially as she is still with us. Why should we so often wait to honour deserving persons, and accord them our gratitude, until they have crossed into the Great Beyond.'

These sentiments stayed with me, and I've tried to live by them in relation to loyal and long-time members of my staff. If the opening ceremony was a thoroughly enjoyable occasion, the play, alas, was not. Hugh Goldie's production of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* was a wordy bore, starred a miscast Beryl Gordon, and brought something of an anti-climax to the evening.

Events in the theatre world during March, while welcome, were unhappily overshadowed by grave political events. On 3 February 1960, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Harold Macmillan, had delivered his historic 'Winds of Change' speech to Parliament, in which he talked of the great changes inexorably sweeping through Africa. We would, he warned, ignore the desire for freedom at our peril.

Macmillan's words, widely reported overseas, failed to pierce the ideological armour of the South African
government. On 21 March, police at Sharpeville, a black township in the Vaal Triangle, fired on a peaceful crowd protesting against the Pass Laws. Sixty-nine unarmed Africans were killed, many of them shot in the back as they fled. The news (and pictures) of this massacre made front pages round the world. At home, the Nationalist government responded by declaring a State of Emergency, and banning certain individuals as well as political organisations (notably the ANC and the PAC).

Sharpeville (local reportage blunted by the absence of TV) marked a major turning point in South Africa's political history. The ANC, driven underground and to despair, formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation); the regime tightened its oppressive control and South Africa effectively became a police state, and a pariah abroad.

Sharpeville cast a pall of gloom over us and, perhaps for the first time since the 1948 election, people were fearful for the future. This event, and our subsequent amputation from the Commonwealth, instigated the first exodus of anxious whites. The country lost a sizeable crop of talented people (particularly among the younger generation) in all fields of endeavour to Britain, the USA, Israel, Australia and Canada.

On the other hand, many of us had no intention of leaving. Certainly, in my case, South Africa was my country and my culture, for better or worse. I was committed to my work, and passionately believed in the value of the live arts.
Life had to go on and, curiously, the world of entertainment flourished amidst the gloom. As in times of war, people perhaps needed the escape provided by the unreal world of the theatre.

However, the repressive climate of the times seemed to affect the judgement of some critics. Even the liberal-minded *Rand Daily Mail* critic (and author of *The Kimberley Train*), Lewis Sowden, fulminated against what he saw as a growing trend towards 'depravity' in the theatre. He had a go at *Champagne Complex*, a frothy comedy about a girl who stripped whenever she drank champagne; at *The Marriage-Go Round*; at the hit musical *Irma la Douce*, and, more seriously, at Leonard's production of Brendan Behan's play *The Hostage*, set in a Dublin brothel. Sowden wrote, 'Admittedly these plays are written with skill and wit. But do wit and skill excuse everything? To enjoy any of them you first have to overcome your sense of shock and then pretend you left your sense of moral values with your car in the parking ground. Schach's latest hit, *The Hostage*, simply reeks of lechery and alcohol. Even *Irma la Douce* would blush at some of the things that go on there ...'

The other side was quick to counter-attack. Brian Brooke said, 'It is time we became more adult and caught up with the international trend.' Hugh Goldie observed that, 'Most of the past year's successful plays have dealt with some aspect of sex', and Leon stated that 'Sex plays form part of every producer's programme, and it is only accidental that many managements are producing such
plays at the moment.' It fell to the Reverend Cecil Tugman to sum up the argument: 'I do not think these plays do any harm, unless people are looking for trouble. I do not admire them particularly, but I think they are just a passing phase.'

This 'passing phase' has continued unabated for four decades. Ironically, the sex and depravity controversy, but for rare cases such as *A Taste of Honey*, was great for Show Service. The publicity fuelled business and the public flocked in expectation of a 'naughty' night out. The irrationality seemed to reflect the wider confusion in the country. The YMCA committee for the Intimate Theatre refused Leonard permission to stage *Lock Up Your Daughters*, a bawdy but otherwise innocuous musical, yet permitted *The Hostage*. These contradictory decisions fuelled another public controversy, contributing to the latter's success.

But this period saw no greater hit with the public than *Irma la Douce*. It not only confirmed, if confirmation were needed, Heather Lloyd-Jones' star status, but with its beguiling score, charming sets, lilting choreography by Frank Staff, and a host of talented actors led by Siegfried Mynhardt, this very French musical comedy about a sought-after whore, her pimp (John Whiteley) and the customer who falls in love with her (Robert Haber), was a smash. The show enjoyed the longest run in Johannesburg to that date, and toured with equal success to all the major cities and the Rhodesias. Unfortunately for me, Show Service still did not have a share in the Brooke company’s
ticket sales!

Undaunted by the failure of *A Taste of Honey*, Taubie and Leon announced that they would present Graham Greene's *The Complaisant Lover* in July, with Taubie directing Leon in the part created by Paul Scofield. They, along with other managements, were both delighted and infuriated by an announcement from the Receiver of Revenue that Entertainment Tax would at last be phased out. That was the good news.

The bad news was that it would only be dropped for shows that could claim to be of cultural, educational or artistic value. This typified the narrow and woolly-headed thinking of government bureaucrats. Who, it was asked, was to make these thoroughly subjective judgements? The committee set up for the purpose eventually became a laughing stock, much as the censorship board did. When GST (and later VAT) was introduced, the tax on entertainment was re-imposed.

It was becoming clear that Show Service would have to consider a move. The large queues in African City arcade, the best sign that our business was in good health, were becoming a severe irritant to others in the building, who sometimes had to battle to get to the lifts, and our neighbour, the perfume shop, was complaining about the level of noise. It was decided that we would look for suitable new premises.

Meanwhile, thanks to the success of Murray Banks, my
personal bank balance had swelled, and for the first time in my life I felt I could justify some extravagance. Leaving Show Service and the search for new premises to my deputy, Pat Bray (who was also the all-powerful secretary of JODS), I decided to turn a long-held dream into a reality and take my first trip to New York and the West Coast of the USA.
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
AN UNOFFICIAL IMPRESARIO

David Bloomberg saw my trip as an opportunity for me to scout for available talent to bring to South Africa, so a major element of my American sojourn involved playing the role of unofficial impresario. Bloomberg also asked me to look for a suitable agent to represent us in London.

Briefed by the committee of the Cotlands Baby Sanctuary to find a novel attraction for a fund-raising drive, I had an inspiration. I had read much about Elsa Maxwell, the world's most famous society 'hostess'. A smart operator, she had perfected her self-appointed role as a facilitator in bringing celebrities together and masterminding the most lavish and glittering social gatherings. So fearsome had her reputation become that her 'invitations' carried the weight of a Royal command, and she was an expert sponger, living free at the world's best hotels.

Elsa Maxwell had come to Johannesburg in about 1910 as accompanist to Dorothy Toye, a vaudeville performer whose ability to sing as both tenor and soprano made her a big hit at the old Empire. The teenage Elsa remained on for a while, conquering Johannesburg society with her precocious gifts as pianist, raconteur and party-giver.

Since wealthy Johannesburg society liked nothing
better than a glamorous ball, what could be more inviting, I thought, than getting Elsa Maxwell to gather some choice celebrities and preside over a charity ball for Cotlands. I wrote to her at the Drake Hotel in New York and she was sufficiently intrigued to consider the idea. She was leaving for Paris, and suggested that I might meet her there to discuss the matter further.

I hastily rearranged my schedule to stop in Paris, and phoned Miss Maxwell at the Ritz where she was staying. The call was answered by a basso profunda voice that I took to be that of a manservant but was actually the formidable Elsa herself. She was entertaining friends to tea, she said, and invited me to join the party. I accepted with alacrity and was met by an extremely tubby little woman (Miss Maxwell was under five foot in height), sporting an unfashionable coiffeur. She introduced me to her guests ... the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and Prince Aly Khan!

When I recovered my composure, I managed quite an animated conversation with the Duchess until Miss Maxwell turned the conversation to South African celebrities.

I mentioned a dozen or so people considered famous in the country at the time and, with each successive name, I could see from her expression that she had clearly never heard of them. By celebrities, she said, she meant people like Maria Callas who, she informed me, had once cancelled a performance at the Edinburgh Festival to attend one of her parties. This was common ground: I told her of my
journey to Edinburgh and my deep disappointment at Callas' absence, to which the hostess with the mostest responded with the haughty observation that her parties took precedence over opera.

Despite all this, Elsa Maxwell didn’t actually say no to my proposal. She told me her minimum fee for a visit would be first class accommodation for herself and five others on the Union Castle liner, plus six thousand dollars per social function. I didn't dare tell her that my total budget was five thousand dollars and, thanking her for tea, said I would take the details back to the Cotlands committee. Three weeks later, I heard on the radio that Aly Khan had been killed in a car crash. I wrote to Miss Maxwell offering my condolences - and asking whether she would reconsider her fee for 'old times sake'. She declined, saying she was far too devastated by the loss of her friend to discuss the matter...

My first effort as an impresario could not be counted a success.

Nor could my second. I went to see agent and producer M. Rene Gola, who handled ballet dancers Roland Petit and his wife, Zizi Jeanmaire. Georges Ulmer, who had starred in the Folies Bergere in Johannesburg and was rehearsing a new show for René Gola, acted as my interpreter. Gola agreed to a season in South Africa for his stars, plus six supporting dancers, two pianists, a dresser and a director at a fee of £2 000 per week. I cabled David Bloomberg with the good news. This was premature. Gola contacted me in the
States to say that the fee could stand, but he would send fewer dancers. This would unbalance our agreed programme and exclude Petit’s version of *Carmen*. Gola wouldn’t budge so that was the end of that. In 1964 Zizi Jeanmaire came out in a big revue for ACT; Petit directed his *Carmen* for PACT Ballet in 1966.

In London I continued my policy of seeing three shows a day. Between times I did the rounds of artists' agents, and met up with Alex Cherniavsky who was negotiating on behalf of ACT for whom he still worked on an ad hoc basis. Certain agents, I soon realised, were playing me off against ACT in case I should be able to better their fees. Little did they know! I got into promising negotiations to bring Luisillo with a company of twenty-eight Spanish dancers in 1961 at a fee of £1 400 per week. Once again, success eluded me. Jim Stodel bettered the offer. I was, however, lucky in finding an agent to represent South African Theatrical Enterprises, as David had called his company. Robert Stigwood was an enthusiastic, ambitious and knowledgeable young Australian just starting out in his career. My instinct led me to choose him in preference to more experienced men. I only wish I’d had the instinct to go into business with him- Robert rose to become one of the giants of theatrical management, producing among other hits on both sides of the Atlantic, *Hair, Oh, Calcutta!, Sweeney Todd, Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*.

With the music and lyrics of tunes such as 'I Like New
York in June' and 'Give My Regards to Broadway' spinning round in my brain, I had my first sight of the famous New York skyline from the back of a taxi. I had landed at Idlewild (now Kennedy) late at night, and was rewarded with the sight of the illuminated skyscrapers. The Empire State and the great Chrysler building were unmistakable, familiar from countless movies.

I had rented an apartment at West 57th Street and 6th Avenue, centrally situated for almost everywhere I needed to go. I spent my first day walking, or should I say hurrying - nobody in Manhattan walks - through the streets, gaping at the sights, exhilarated by the electric atmosphere of this most brash, energetic and exciting of cities.

That night I saw Ethel Merman in Gypsy, my first Broadway show. With its wonderful Jule Styne score and brilliant lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, this is still one of the best of American musicals, and with the powerhouse Miss Merman as Rose, the pushy show biz mother of real life stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, it was the perfect beginning to four weeks of New York theatregoing.

I followed Gypsy with Mary Martin in The Sound of Music, Robert Preston in The Music Man, and Bye, Bye Birdie with the dynamic Chita Rivera and Dick Van Dyke. Then Actors Equity called a strike and all the mainstream theatres closed. While pondering what to do, I wandered into a gimmick shop, emerging half-an-hour later with a fake newspaper headlined 'Tucker Arrives On Broadway ... Actors Go On Strike'.
I knew there had to be life beyond Broadway and decided nothing would deter me from making the most of my stay. In the event, the strike led me to some unexpected and incomparable experiences.

A compulsive newspaper reader, I bought an obscure tabloid to read over morning coffee and chanced on an advertisement for a Freedom Rally, organised by the NAACP to raise funds for Martin Luther King and to protest against the treatment of blacks in the South. The Rally would incorporate a concert, admission a mere two dollars, in which a glittering line-up of famous black entertainers would appear.

Friends warned me against going to the Armory in Harlem, but I would see and hear Lena Horne, Harry Belafonte, Sarah Vaughan, William Warfield, Sidney Poitier and Dorothy Dandridge, among many others, and nothing was going to keep me away. In Harlem I found myself one of about five hundred whites in an audience of some twenty thousand people. Fiery speeches and religious rituals were followed by the concert, which went on into the early hours of the morning, and I was caught up in the fervour and passion of these people. The irony of being a South African didn’t escape me, and when somebody asked me where I was from, I am ashamed to say I said Kenya.

It was a spectacular occasion, still in my personal Top Ten list. When I got back to my apartment I found a string of messages from concerned friends checking on my safety. The Harlem evening was the first of several fabulous
jazz concerts that came my way. The next was at Madison Square Garden. There was Sarah Vaughan again, and the bands of Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, and Woody Herman; The Ahmad Jamal Trio played, as did drummer Gene Krupa and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie; there were appearances, too, by the Hi-Lo’s and Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. I had to pinch myself to make sure this was really happening to Percy Tucker of Benoni, especially when a friend took me to the after-show party.

After that came the Newport Festival, where Joan Baez and Pete Seeger were two of the artists, then it was more jazz at the First Atlantic Jazz Festival. The by now familiar figures of Count Basie and Sarah Vaughan were joined by Gerry Mulligan, Oscar Petersen, Stan Getz, Ray Charles and Dave Brubeck.

Next on the agenda was dance. I spent a few wonderful days in Massachusetts at the oddly named Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival where I saw Indrani and her company from India, the Royal Danish Ballet, the Joffrey, and the Ballet Espanol Ximenes-Vargas. It was mind-boggling.

Also during the Broadway strike I saw Japanese Noh theatre, performed by the famous all-male Grand Kabuki company. The exoticism of the rich costumes and graceful movements was marvellous to behold, but the eerie Oriental music and ancient (14th-century) conventions were somewhat bemusing. Fortunately, we were given earphones with English translation, and a commentary explaining the history and meaning of the rituals. It was a
taxing but rewarding evening.

I attended a theatrically historical occasion, the first public performance at Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio, training ground for 'the Method' which had spawned such actors as Marlon Brando and Paul Newman. The performance, in aid of building funds, consisted of scenes worked out in class by some of Strasberg's more illustrious alumni, Jo Van Fleet, Eli Wallach and Anne Bancroft among them.

With the strike over, I resumed my acquaintance with Broadway, seeing anything and everything. I also visited off-Broadway theatres, where the most interesting and off-beat work is often to be seen. I went to *The Fantasticks*, a small-scale, highly original musical fable, which had opened on 3 May that year at the Sullivan Street Playhouse. Thirty-seven years later it was still running off-Broadway in the same theatre. This thoroughly delightful show was produced more than once in South Africa (the first time by Kushlick-Gluckman), but nobody fully captured its essence and it was never particularly successful.

Once I had found my feet, I arranged a series of meetings with the New York artists' agents. My initial expectations were high and, looking back on the correspondence arising out of my endeavours, I'm amazed at my own 'chutzpah'. I made offers to Liberace, Howard Keel, Bob Hope, Doris Day, Eddie Fisher, Tony Martin and Cyd Charisse, and even Ol' Blue Eyes himself, Frank
Sinatra. Fees for these artists in those days were laughably low in comparison to today's, but I found myself up against two insurmountable problems: lack of suitable venues, and competition from ACT. Eventually, several of these artists came here for Pieter Toerien and Basil Rubin, the Quibell Brothers, Yango John, and for Sun City, brokered by my cousin Hazel Feldman.

I changed tack and began investigating less ambitious one or two man shows. This, too, was a somewhat disheartening process involving several possibilities that came to nothing. One of these was Ray Bolger, the scintillating dancer who created the Scarecrow in the film of *The Wizard of Oz* with Judy Garland. I saw a rehearsal of a small show of his dancing highlights, ideal for touring, and met him to discuss an engagement. I was convinced he would be a great draw here, and he seemed enthusiastic. To my disappointment, he called me to say that he had been advised against playing in South Africa. This was some twenty-five years before the cultural boycott took hold.

I was never in favour of the cultural boycott. It has always seemed to me that such a course has no effect at all on the people it intends to hurt, but is catastrophic for everybody else, both economically and culturally. Strangely enough, despite the wide reporting of Sharpeville and its aftermath, the agents made no mention of the political situation during our discussions.

Another problem I faced was that many of the suitable candidates had become popular through television, and
were thus absolutely unknown in South Africa. At last, however, I thought I had one in the bag when stage, screen and TV actor Hal Holbrook, with the extra inducement of a few days in the Game Reserve, agreed to a three-week engagement to tour his one-man show of readings from Mark Twain. (The adventurous author of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* had lectured in South Africa during his world tour of 1896). But fortune still failed to smile. Holbrook slipped a disc and the tour was cancelled.

When I went to hear Benny Goodman and his Band at the Basin Street East Club, the programme featured somebody called Barbra Streisand. I had no idea who she was, and neither did anybody else, but boy, could this unknown sing! Two years later she debuted on Broadway in *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, and the rest is history.

Subsequently, Ian Bernhardt phoned me in New York to ask whether I could find a jazz musician to come out in aid of Union Artists. I approached Goodman, and the twin problems of segregation and lack of venues surfaced. The leader of perhaps the greatest swing band in the world, a most affable man, was born in Chicago's Jewish ghetto and had been one of the first white musicians to include blacks in his band. He agreed to come on the express understanding that he would only play to multiracial audiences. The cost of bringing him out would make it necessary to gross £1 500 per performance, a large sum in those days. To get Benny Goodman was worth any number of difficulties. On my return home, Ian Bernhardt and I
Percy Tucker

explored every possible large venue that could escape the segregation laws. It came down to sports stadiums, but neither Ellis Park nor the Rand Stadium was available, and our request to the Wanderers Club to build a stage on the cricket ground was turned down flat. So South Africans never got to hear the great clarinettist in person.

Extraordinarily, though, our racial policies were less of a deterrent than I expected. I was invited to address a meeting of Actors Equity to explain the situation, and the first indication I had that American artists were, on the whole, not too concerned, was the small attendance. Those who came were pretty sanguine about segregation - they had heard it all before in their own country, particularly in the South.

I met Paul Taylor, one of the great modern dance exponents of our time, who invited me to watch his show from backstage. It was an overwhelming experience, with an introduction to the legendary Martha Graham as the cherry on the top. In 1960 I didn't consider that South Africans were ready to embrace modern dance. Today it is one of our most thriving art forms and one in which blacks are prominent.

Before I had left for New York, we had engaged an American dancer named Paul Draper. All the venues had been booked when I got an urgent call from David saying that Draper's visa had been cancelled on political grounds (he apparently had 'communist' affiliations) and it was imperative to find a replacement.
Agent Bill Burnham had taken me to see a husband-and-wife dance and mime team called Mata and Hari. It was an unusual, appealing show which I felt would go down well with South Africans. When I got David's S.O.S I called Bill, only to learn that the couple were leaving for California within the hour. I rushed to their apartment and joined their taxi ride to the airport. I persuaded, coaxed and negotiated en route, and we signed an agreement as the taxi pulled in to La Guardia. Mata and Hari came out later that year. Audiences were limited, but we covered our costs and were proud to have presented them.

Alex Cherniavsky, in whose footsteps I had been so haltingly attempting to follow, had given me a letter of introduction to Sol Hurok, the most inspired and powerful impresario in the US and, possibly, in the world.

The Russian-born Hurok was the last of a breed, a cultured man and a flamboyant showman with a high public profile. From the 1920s onwards, he had almost single-handedly transformed the entertainment map of America, introducing small-town audiences throughout the country to ballet, opera, music and theatre of the highest order. He had promoted artists such as Isadora Duncan, Arthur Rubinstein, Isaac Stern, Van Cliburn, Marion Anderson, Rudolf Nureyev, and ballet companies from the Royal to the Bolshoi, pioneering the Soviet-American cultural exchange.

On my subsequent trips to the States, I always called on
Sol Hurok. After my first meeting with him in 1960, he invited me to an Arthur Rubinstein recital at Carnegie Hall, followed by dinner at the Russian Tearoom with the great pianist and other luminaries of the concert world. I sat at the dinner in silent wonderment, fascinated by the intellectual exchange, the cultivated repartee, and numerous hilarious anecdotes about temperamental artists. One story in particular, told by Rubinstein against himself, stands out in my memory.

During his first visit to Moscow after World War II, the pianist was convinced that his hotel room was bugged. Since many of the friends who would be visiting him were politically suspect in the Communist era, he instituted a thorough search of his room but could find no sign of a bugging device. At the dead of night, unable to sleep, he crawled under his bed and took a good look. Sure enough, there were the wires. Using the only tool at hand, his nail file, he patiently sawed through the wires and climbed back into bed for a good night’s sleep.

The next morning the hotel manager in a state of obvious agitation, sought Rubinstein out and, wringing him warmly by the hand, exclaimed, 'Thank heavens you are all right, maestro.' He then told the bemused pianist that the man in the room directly beneath his own had been found dead, killed by the fall of a chandelier directly above his bed ...

At the magnificent old Metropolitan Opera on 39th Street, I first heard the Met’s leading tenor, Richard Tucker.
After the performance (Verdi’s *The Masked Ball* in which Sweden's Birgit Nilsson sang Amelia) I went backstage to try and meet my namesake. His eldest son was screening the visitors and I introduced myself as a long-lost Tucker cousin. Intrigued, his son took me through. 'I am your long-lost cousin, the Jungle impresario, come to invite you to Africa,' I said, tongue-in-cheek - but meaning the invitation part. Richard told me to forget Africa and come and have dinner with him and his wife Sara.

Thus, began a friendship that lasted until Richard’s untimely death in 1975, and he did, indeed, come to South Africa in 1968.

I left New York for Las Vegas and the West Coast, armed with invaluable letters of introduction. All doors were opened for me, and in Las Vegas, where I stayed at the Sands, I saw and met the stars who were appearing in cabaret. These included another Tucker. Sophie.

Buxom, raunchy, brassy-voiced, Sophie Tucker was known as 'The Last of the Red-Hot Mommas'. World famous for her rendition of 'Some of These Days', and for 'My Yiddishe Mamma', the song which touched Jewish audiences, particularly. Sophie was a huge star, and far and away the most dynamic singing comedienne of her time.

We dined together after her cabaret, and she told me Jim Stodel had booked her for an ACT tour. For this she was assembling new material, sensational gowns, a fantastical hairdo, jewels and orchids. 'Your audience always expects something new, something better... I always do everything
to deliver,’ she told me. Her sense of humour was great. As we sat down to dinner that evening - Sophie loved her food - she said, 'I've been rich, and I've been poor. Rich is better.'

In Los Angeles, I signed Jewish comedian and musician Mickey Katz for January 1961 at a cost of $2 500 per week, plus four air fares. I would handle the tour on the same basis as I had for Murray Banks. Mickey talked constantly of his son, whom he insisted was going to be a big star. This turned out no idle boast, the son, Joel Grey, won a Tony award, then an Oscar, for his portrayal, on stage and screen, of the decadent, Jew-hating Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret*.

Mickey Katz took me to lunch at the Friar’s Club in L.A. where Frank Sinatra was the guest of honour. The Marx brothers, Chico, Harpo and Groucho were present, and sitting at a table in a corner playing bridge, were two of the Ritz brothers.

I went to San Francisco to see comedian Shelley Berman (and the Golden Gate). I didn't enjoy his show, preferring a comic named Myron Cohen. Both came here in the late Sixties for Toerien/Rubin.

After three exhilarating and unforgettable months, during which I was captivated by America and its entertainment world, I flew home feeling as though I’d been away for a lifetime. The reality was that 1960 was far from over and Show Service was set for further expansion.
I returned to a hive of activity. We had found ground floor offices at the end of a wide passage, away from the lifts and ideal for queuing, in Rand Central, a new building in Jeppe Street. We signed a lease and prepared to move in October. Meanwhile, I commissioned Anthony Farmer to design a practical interior that would maximise the space, facilitating access to ticket books and plans, and allowing transactions to be carried out as quickly and smoothly as possible.

We still had to cope with the regular irritant of enquiries for African Consolidated Theatres shows, but my old adversary Jim Stodel, with whom I’d developed a reasonably cordial relationship, sent his managers to take a look at our operations. This resulted in Show Service at long last having a share in ticket-selling for ACT, but we were only given a limited allocation of a few rows here and there.

This system, still operates world-wide today (with London the worst culprit), is impractical, and deeply unfair to the customer, who is often told that a popular show is sold out when, in fact, only the agency allocation is sold out. My objection to this was a contributing factor to the philosophy behind Computicket: an agency must offer a comprehensive service, giving all customers equal
opportunity and choice. Jim Stodel took a lively interest in our business, but he wasn't pleased with our drain of his own box-office staff- even Ann Stuart, the cashier with whom I'd had my altercation back in 1951, was now working for me.

It appealed to the sentimental side of my nature that Rand Central stood on the site of the old Bijou Cinema, a small art deco movie house which had fallen victim to progress, but where I had spent many hours entranced by the films of Hollywood's golden era, the Thirties and Forties. Until the early Sixties, cinemagoing was a civilised affair, a real 'outing', particularly in the big houses like the Colosseum or the old 20th Century. The managers wore evening suits (even in the afternoon!), the ushers were neatly uniformed (and actually ushered you to your seats, torches in hand). And audiences, too, dressed for the occasion- men in suits and ties, women in hats and gloves!

There were documentaries and newsreels, as well as trailers and adverts before the 'big picture', and at the Colosseum an orchestral interlude conducted by the flamboyant Charles Manning. At the Metro, Dean Herrick would rise from the bowels of the earth, seated at a splendid organ, and there were organists at other cinemas, with the words of songs displayed on the screen for those who wanted to sing along.

By 1960, all this was beginning to change, starting the move to today's multiplexes and more or less continuous showings. And it was in 1960 that Show Service first became
involved with cinema. That year, Drama Entertainments (Pty) Ltd, was formed to present the latest gimmick in film, Cinerama, in a cinema purpose-built for, and named after, it. With my eye on ticket sales possibilities, I became a shareholder in the company and was, indeed, approached to deal with the bookings.

Audiences wholeheartedly embraced the novelty of this all-involving technique, and the queues for This is Cinerama, Seven Wonders of the World and How the West Was Won stretched to infinity. We manned the box office at the cinema as well as at Show Service, and I engaged Iona Myburgh from Metro to take charge at Cinerama, beginning a thirty-four- year-long association during which she came to head what I considered the nerve centre of Computicket, the Information Department. Like most revolutionary cinema gimmicks, Cinerama was relatively short lived, and the original premises are now a derelict nightclub. Happily, I had profitably sold my shares long before the making of Cinerama films ceased and the enterprise died a natural death.

Throughout the year, the 'regulars' of our local theatre - the National, the Reps, Children's Theatre, JODS, Brian Brooke - continued to be active. Kushlick-Gluckman's The Complaisant Lover, in which Leon co-starred with Marijke Haakman (who later married John McElvey and moved to London) was reasonably successful. The all-black In Township Tonite did booming business, and Eldorado, an indigenous musical written by Ralph Trewhela and set in
early gold-rush, Johannesburg, enjoyed a respectable run at the Brooke after *Irma la Douce* had vacated the theatre.

The Windmill Theatre had closed permanently, but at the Library Ruth Oppenheim continued to present controversial plays. German playwright Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, a sombre rites-of-passage piece, failed to attract audiences despite the *scandale* of the leading boy simulating masturbation on stage. Undaunted, the director plunged into *A State of Innocence*, a steamy, sub-Tennessee Williams drama set in the Deep South. This was not an American play, but had been written by my friend Clive Hirschhorn. Then a twenty-year-old arts student at Wits and an active member of the University Players, Clive had written this ambitious piece while still in his teens. He was thrilled to see it brought to life at the Library Theatre with a cast headed by no less than Marjorie Cordon and Johann Nell.

On 15 September 1960, the seventy-fourth anniversary of the proclamation of Johannesburg, I was present when the first sod of earth was turned in Braamfontein for the new Civic Theatre, to be built at a cost of R1.2 million and due to open in 1962. Meanwhile, another new venue, the Playhouse, also in Braamfontein, was nearing completion. Slowly but surely, the provision of venues for what was now undoubtedly a flourishing theatre scene, was receiving attention.

The inaugural production at the Playhouse in October
was *For Love or Money*, a new show by and with Adam Leslie. Directed by Michael Finlayson, it was more ambitious than Adam's previous successes but, despite the presence of his now regular stage partner Joan Blake, plus Olive King, comedian Garth Meade, a line-up of glamorous showgirls and an attempt at lavish ensemble numbers to temper the satire, the show was a flop. Matters weren't helped by technical problems at the Playhouse, which delayed the opening and weren't really sorted out when the curtain went up; but even had things gone smoothly, the show was a lacklustre affair, and an unhappy time for all concerned.

Adam, under stress, had fought with Michael, with his stage management and with half his cast. Although capable of great charm, this prodigiously talented man was something of a Jekyll and Hyde, and his wicked sense of humour could turn cruel and vicious when he was roused. The whole town knew the show was in trouble, and the disappointment of the first night and the short, unsuccessful run didn't augur well for the Playhouse.

However, things improved when Leonard Schach's production of *The Aspern Papers* arrived there after its successful seasons at the Hofmeyr and on tour. Michael Redgrave's adaptation of this Henry James story had been spectacularly successful in London the previous year, and had won Flora Robson the *Evening Standard* Award for Best Actress. It was Flora Robson, now Dame Flora, who played the role in South Africa, realising Leonard’s thirteen-year
long dream of bringing her here. Her co-star was Canadian actor Robert Beatty, and the polish of the partnership in this intriguing play ensured a sold-out run.

Although not feeling at all well on the opening night, Dame Flora gave an inspired performance for most of the evening. Towards the end of the play, however, it became clear that something was wrong and, as the final curtain fell, the leading lady collapsed. The audience was cheated of the curtain calls, but many of them saw the unconscious actress being carried out and lowered into my Citroen outside the stage door. Accompanied by a distraught Leonard, I rushed Flora to the emergency department of the nearby Lady Dudley, where we waited an hour for the doctor's verdict: an acute attack of gastro-enteritis, causing such severe pain that Flora had passed out. Thankfully, she was well enough to be on stage the following night.

I spent a lot of pleasurable time with Flora Robson while she was here. Les Dishy, an officer of the M.O.T.H.S. and a future mayor of Johannesburg, used to organise performances by black choirs. I took Flora to hear Handel's 'Messiah' at the City Hall. She was entranced by the choir's musicality, and asked to meet and compliment the singers. I also took her to a rehearsal for the forthcoming London production of King Kong, which she adored.

When the run of The Aspern Papers ended, I took Flora and Leonard on a four-day trip to the Kruger Park. It must have been the mating season, for no matter where or at what time we ventured out, we saw animals coupling. It
became quite hilarious, and Flora, absolutely fascinated by this phenomenon, put her 16mm movie camera to good use. The trip was a resounding success and, since then, I've lost count of the times I've taken visiting artists and friends to the game reserve.

On 28 December 1960, Leonard Schach announced that he had signed a two-year lease with the Playhouse. At the same time, Kushlick-Gluckman announced that they had taken a twelve-month lease on the Intimate. Johannesburg could now look forward to South Africa's three major independent production companies providing competitive stimulus to the theatre.

By the following April, Breytie Breytenbach had concluded an arrangement with the Reps to lease the Alexander as a Johannesburg home for the National Theatre, presenting three plays annually, and ending their long years as an itinerant company. Little did they know that this 'permanency' would last only one season and end in the dissolution of the NTO. Meanwhile, in theatre circles and at Show Service, there was only rejoicing at all this activity. The dear old Library continued functioning as an intermittent venue for smaller companies, and even the Technical College was occasionally used, notably for seasons of fascinating Yiddish theatre.

Amidst all this good news, the year ended with suitably seasonal guffaws at the Brooke Theatre, where Brian directed a revival of a much-loved farce, *Charley's Aunt*, with Stuart Brown in the title role and Lorna Cowell as the
real aunt.

In March 1961, the Treason Trial, which had begun in December 1956, ended after a series of acquittals had left only thirty defendants, including Nelson Mandela, in the dock. To the ire of the government, the judges returned a verdict of not guilty.

On 31 May, South Africa became a Republic, severed from the British Commonwealth.

The country’s new status was reflected in the conversion of our currency from pounds, shillings and pence to rands and cents. The last tram ran in Johannesburg, removing a feature that had been familiar in our streets since 1906.

In the theatre, too, a piece of our history was lost with the death of Andre Huguenet. He made his final appearance in *The Prisoner*, the first of the National Theatre’s plays under the new agreement with the Alexander. Sadly, the public stayed away, missing their last opportunity to see an actor whose gigantic presence on our stages was unique.

With the passing of the old Afrikaans touring companies, Andre had often found himself in the wilderness, unemployed and broke, and having to do jobs (such as managing the Pigalle Cinema) that lesser men would have considered beneath their dignity. His influence on a younger generation of actors, like Patrick Mynhardt, was incalculable, and the devotion he inspired universal.
He died ill, alone and poverty-stricken on 15 June.

By 1961 my little ticket-selling agency had grown into something rather more than that. By now I had arranged and managed several tours, made valuable contacts overseas, and forged close working relationships with all the local producers and managements. There was very little that went on in Johannesburg that did not filter through my office, and through my work with ACT, I met virtually all the visiting overseas artists. Most importantly, I and my staff were in daily contact with the public. When an advance announcement was made about a show, I could gauge the degree of public interest from the number of enquiries we received. When booking opened, I could judge the response from the size of the queues. If advertising was failing to engender interest, I knew it, and could advise managements and promoters to redouble or refocus their efforts. I was in constant touch with managements, as well as sitting on the SAATM board, and was well-placed to advise on pricing, and whether or not to extend a run or, in unhappy cases, cut it short.

We were a conduit to public thinking and, unofficially but palpably, Show Service was beginning to function as a marketing operation - albeit an even-handed and unbiased one. I would never allow my staff to recommend one show in preference to another, or to voice a negative opinion in answer to questions. That was not our function, and would have betrayed the trust of those I advised.
In effect, Show Service was rapidly becoming the focal point of theatrical planning in Johannesburg. Because so much of what I had done since its inception had never been done before, I was able to make my own rules - and I set no boundaries. As a result, I had some truly extraordinary experiences. Not all of them were pleasant, but most of them I would have been sorry to miss.

The first production of 1961 at the Reps caused some excitement. Time to Kill, a tense thriller, was the first stage play by local radio writer and producer Monte Doyle, and starred Heather Lloyd-Jones and British actor Brian Haines. It was hugely successful, but the countrywide tour had to be terminated in Durban because Heather was heavily pregnant. The play later opened in London, retitled Signpost to Murder and starring Margaret Lockwood.

Also, that year, the National Theatre at the Alexander presented Eugene O'Neill's A Touch of the Poet, directed by the distinguished American Margaret Webster, which brought Marda Vanne back to the Johannesburg stage.

Taubie and Leon decided to mount a revival of The Women and held open auditions. Over two hundred hopefuls turned up. It opened on 29 February, designed by Anthony Farmer, with Shirley Firth, Jenny Gratus, Valerie Miller and Diane Wilson (in the part the young Moira Lister had played thirteen years earlier) in the lead roles. Tony Farmer was also active at JODS, where he directed Ivor Novella's The Dancing Years and Naughtty Marietta, and did
the only Children's Theatre production for the year, *Beauty and the Beast*.

Leonard Schach's Cockpit Players maintained a high standard at the Playhouse, where the varied programme included Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* with Siegfried Mynhardt, Michael McGovern and Nigel Hawthorne, and Paddy Chayefsky's prizewinning *The Tenth Man*, in which those three actors also appeared.

Nigel Hawthorne is a real success story. The son of a Cape Town doctor, he began his professional career with Brian Brooke, but the bulk of his work was for the Cockpit Players, for whom he gave a large number of impressive performances. He left for London in 1962 where, after a period of disheartening struggle, he scored a huge success in the West End in *Privates on Parade*. Cast as the co-lead with Paul Eddington in the immensely popular TV series *Yes, Minister*, he became a household name, and has been garlanded with best actor awards, receiving London's Olivier Award and Broadway's Tony for his portrayal of C.S. Lewis in *Shadowlands*. His theatre awards for the title role in *The Madness of King George III* were followed by an Oscar nomination for the film.

In 1995 Nigel Hawthorne returned to Johannesburg for the first time in thirty-two years to make a film, *Inside*, with *Bonnie and Clyde* director Arthur Penn. I had the pleasure of hosting a party at my home to reunite Nigel with his colleagues from the old days in the theatre here.

Success hadn't changed him; he was level-headed and
At the Playhouse, Leonard followed *The Caretaker* with *The Miracle Worker*, William Gibson's play about Helen Keller, born deaf, mute and blind, and her childhood relationship with Annie Sullivan who taught her to communicate and, eventually, to talk. It is an astounding piece of theatre, confrontational, inspirational, and powerfully moving, and presents a major challenge to actresses. Reinet Maasdorp and Fiona Fraser as Helen and Annie respectively, met the challenge head-on, making for one of the best evenings of theatre that year.

Ten years earlier the adult Helen Keller had come to Johannesburg to receive an honorary doctorate from Wits University, and I was present to hear her remarkable speech. Afterwards, I went up to congratulate her, and she read my lips with her fingers. This brief encounter with so courageous a human being was a privilege.

African Theatres presented pianist Gina Bachauer and Metropolitan Opera tenor Jan Peerce, both paying return visits to South Africa. After Peerce's recital, Alex Cherniavsky introduced me to the tenor, to whom I said, 'I know your sister and brother-in-law, Sara and Richard Tucker'. This friendly overture was met with a stony silence, which Jan eventually broke with 'We don't speak'. I later learned that there had been a family argument years earlier and, despite their working together at the Met, enmity prevailed for the rest of their lives.

Mickey Katz came out as arranged. Audiences loved...
him, and as the booking figures showed, word of mouth was terrific. This was a relief after the opening performance at the City Hall, when we gave the unsold seats to residents from old-age homes. These elderly people kicked up something of a commotion because they couldn't see properly in the unraked City Hall. It took some powers of persuasion to quiet them down with a careful explanation that the front rows had been paid for by members of the public.

During a flying visit to New York on business for David Bloomberg in 1961, I met Bette Davis, whose lawyer had enquired whether I was interested in organising a South African tour for this great star of the screen. Things had been going badly for Bette since a court case in which she had sued Warner Bros., and her film career was on hold.

I met Miss Davis at her apartment, where she smoked incessantly. Delirious with the wonder of this meeting, I asked if I might light a cigarette for her a la Paul Henreid in *Now, Voyager*. She acquiesced to this eccentric request and I, a non-smoker, somehow managed to carry off the moment. (For those who've never seen it, Henreid puts two cigarettes between his lips, lights both and gives one to Davis. It began a fashion among lovers which lasted for decades).

I discussed a South African tour with Bette Davis, extolling the beauties of our landscape and dangling my new-found carrot, the Game Reserve, and she said she would give it serious thought. Shortly afterwards, she took
out a full page in Variety, the show business 'bible', advertising her services, and before long she was back on screen, giving an Academy Award-nominated performance, opposite Joan Crawford in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*? I met Bette once again when she was playing Miss Moffat in a musical version of Emlyn Williams' *The Corn is Green*, but she never did come to South Africa.

Back home, the Karmon Israeli Dancers came on their first tour here, as did the blind Greek pianist Georges Themeli. Mercedes Molina staged a season of Spanish dance, and Bertha Egnos directed an all-black musical, *Dingaka*, which enjoyed a nine-week run at the Brooke Theatre and was subsequently filmed by Jamie Uys.

Black actor, writer and director Gibson Kente, a substantial force in building a theatre audience in the townships, presented a tour of his play, *Sikhalo*, and Union Artists brought the distinguished Indian director Krishna Shah to South Africa to mount Rabindranath Tagore's King of the *Dark Chamber*. This magnificent spectacle of Indian drama with music and dance, starred two visiting Indian stars, the beautiful Surya Kumari and the renowned dancer, Baskhar. The show opened in Durban before coming to the Wits Great Hall. Miss Kumari suffered the indignity of being asked to leave a 'white' queue at the post office, and found her visit here a terrible strain.

In September, I went with Leon Gluckman to the Rehearsal Room at Dorkay House to see the first Johannesburg performance (it had opened at the Rhodes
Theatre in Grahamstown in July) of Athol Fugard's The Blood Knot. Acclaimed as 'a milestone in South African theatre', in political terms it certainly was. The story of the relationship between half-brothers, one black, the other passing for white, it rode roughshod over current taboos, and under the aegis of Leon, who presented it at the Intimate Theatre in November- over the apartheid laws, by having a white and a black actor together on stage. Athol played the white man, Zakes Mokae his brother. Zakes went on to play the role in London opposite Ian Bannen at the Arts Theatre, before making a career in New York where he won a Tony Award for Fugard's Master Harold … and the Boys. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of The Blood Knot, he and Athol reunited to revive it on Broadway.

On a lighter note, pop idol Cliff Richard came on tour with The Shadows. (Aubrey Louw stage-managed for ACT). Cliff received the full red-carpet-and-ticker-tape treatment, and the press had a field day with stories of hysterical young female fans who tried every ruse to get to him, even attempting to scale the drainpipes at the Carlton.

Tennis was at the forefront again in November when Owen Williams was asked by Jack Kramer to run the first Kramer Cup final (an international contest run along Davis Cup lines). At last South Africa was to see international champions play competitive as opposed to exhibition tennis. The 1961 semi-final had been played in Barcelona, and Johannesburg welcomed the finalists, Australia and the United States. The former (Rosewall, Hoad, Ashley Cooper
and Mal Anderson) beat the three-man latter (Tony Trabert, Earl Buchholz and Barry Mackay), in a thrilling five-match series played over three days. Public interest in the game grew rapidly.

In December, Taubie Kushlick presented an imported British production of *Rattle of a Simple Man* with Edward Woodward, Pauline Stroud, and New Zealand-born Kerry Jordan. On opening night, Edward Woodward was in severe pain from a series of inoculations he had had before leaving London, and was barely able to get himself to the stage. Stage director Valda Blumberg, unaware of the cause of the pain, gave him a large shot of brandy. The alcohol reacted with the medication to produce the outward symptoms of drunkenness and, to Taubie's dismay, the resulting fiasco caused the play to flop.

Kerry Jordan joined the touring cast of *Beyond the Fringe*, which Leonard had presented at the Hofmeyr and then the Playhouse. This four-man British satirical revue had made stars of its creators, Jonathan Miller, Peter Cooke, Dudley Moore and Alan Bennett, and was a massive success in this country despite the 'Englishness' of its humour. Alas, though, it marked the final appearance of a very ill David Beattie.

Towards the end of the year, Leon Gluckman began work on *The Red Silk Umbrella*, a play by James Ambrose Brown with music by Arthur Evans. Two weeks into rehearsal his leading lady, June Shannon, an actress with a magnificent singing voice, got into a row with her violently
jealous boyfriend. In consequence, she fell off a fire escape and broke both her ankles. *The Red Silk Umbrella* came to an abrupt end for the time being, leaving Leon with the urgent problem of finding another show to fill the slot at the Intimate Theatre.

Thus, out of necessity, an international, money-spinning success was born ...
CHAPTER TWENTY
SURPRISE PACKAGES

Faced with replacing *The Red Silk Umbrella*, Leon turned to Andrew and Paul Tracey, musician sons of Dr Hugh Tracey, a leading authority on African music. The Tracey boys, occasional performers though not theatre people, had an impressive mastery of several instruments - guitar, lute, the mbira, timbala, kalimba and Lozi drums - and a repertoire of international folk music and songs. Leon decided to build a musical entertainment round them and their work. (Within weeks they added the tuba, clarinet, recorder, trombone and bagpipes to their accomplishments).

Realising he needed more than the Traceys' musical gifts to sustain an evening of theatre, Leon assembled a company that included Kendrew Lascelles, an experienced actor, comedian and mime with an offbeat imagination, who fed ideas into the show. Then in came Jeremy Taylor, a young Englishman who taught school by day, and played guitar and sang in coffee bars by night. Very talented, he wrote most of the original songs for the show.

Leon and his company of eight players- five of whom had never been on a stage -created the 'musical revue' as they went along and emerged with something that captured the public imagination but was very difficult to describe.
On 17 January 1962, the curtain went up - late- on a phenomenon called *Wait a Minim*! Journalistic comments ranged from the imprecise 'zany and madcap' to the uninformative 'lovely young people in a lively young show'. Since most of these 'lovely young people' were patently lacking in stagecraft, designer Anthony Farmer devised a series of brightly coloured and ingenious screens that moved across the stage, masking the awkward exits and entrances. Leon worked these into a crucial component of the show.

At 6.45 p.m. on opening night, I arrived at the Intimate to be met with the unpromising sight of Leon and Tony Farmer down on their knees with turpentine and brushes, scrubbing the stage. The assistant stage manager, in an excess of zeal, had painted the floor and Tony’s sliding screens wouldn’t travel. Within minutes, having instructed the house manager on no account to open the doors until further notice, I, too, was on all fours with a scrubbing brush.

The glamorous first night audience, confined to the small, crowded foyer, grew increasingly bemused and suspicious. The curtain finally rose at eight-thirty on the first surprise in a year of surprises.

The revue, a *mélange* of music, mime, song, satire, dance and general craziness, broke new ground, and was enthusiastically received. The bookings, however, failed to reflect the opening night reaction and remained very average for a few weeks. We nursed the show along until,
without warning, the queues at Show Service gathered momentum - so much so that we had to put two cashiers exclusively on *Wait a Minim!,* one for current bookings and one for advance sales.

We were unable to account for this sudden rush to the box office, so Iona Myburgh and I went from person to person in the queues, asking them why they had come. Ninety per cent of them, it emerged, had visited the Rand Easter Show where the Gallo Record Company were playing a recording of Jeremy Taylor singing a number from the show, 'Ag, Pleez Daddy'. And that's how a runaway success was born! Gallo's subsequent recording of the entire show became a bestseller, while the single of 'Ag, Pleez Daddy' sold 30 000 copies within ten days of its release. Springbok Radio deemed it unsuitable to play on the air because the word 'voetsak' featured in the lyrics, along with mentions of Coca-Cola and Canada Dry ...

The show ran for seventeen weeks in Johannesburg before touring the country. In Durban the season, booked at the Jewish Guild, was sold out before opening night, and the show had to be moved into the 1 100 seater Alhambra; it was similarly sold out in the Rhodesias, Cape Town, Pretoria, and Port Elizabeth, where an *Evening Post* journalist wrote, 'Isn't it ironic that Leon Gluckman, who is really interested in serious theatre, should have his greatest financial success from the zany revue, produced as a stop gap'. The show returned to Johannesburg for a two-week run at the Alexander Theatre, toured again and came back
to play at the Colony in the Hyde Park Hotel, the first non-cabaret ever to be staged in a Johannesburg nightclub.

On 8 December 1962, *Wait a Minim!* ended a run that totalled eleven months and had brought our Rand Central premises its longest queues to date. It wasn't the end of the story. A hugely successful sequel, *Minim Bili* ('Bili' is Nguni for 'two'), which opened in April 1963 with a cast that included Annabel Linder, was followed by *Minim Export*, an amalgam of the previous two and the best of the three. Dana Valery, the talented sister of Sergio Galli, was in this last which, under its original name of *Wait a Minim!*, opened at the Fortune Theatre in London in 1964. It played there for two years before going to the Golden Theatre in New York for a year, followed by an American tour and then seasons in Australia and New Zealand.

Music in all its forms, from classical recitals through opera, pop, revue and musical comedy, was in generous supply throughout 1962. Jascha Horenstein came as guest conductor of the SABC Orchestra, and the country as a whole was graced with tours by pianists Tamas Vasary, Benno Moiseiwitsch and Leonard Pennario, the violinist Johanna Martzy, the Suk Trio, the Boccherini Quintet under English conductor Norman del Mar, and the Vienna Octet. Some of these artists were brought out by Peta Fisher's Musica Viva, still growing, and unique in ploughing its profits back into the organisation's coffers; others came through the always active Johannesburg Musical Society.

During the year, four sound-track recordings of local
shows were on sale: *King Kong, Irma la Douce, Wait a Minim!* and *Oliver!.*

Lionel Bart's hit West End musical adaptation of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* opened at the Brooke Theatre in February 1962, duplicating Sean Kenny's strikingly original London sets. The cast was headed by Arne Gordon as Fagin, Ivor van Rensburg as Bill Sikes, Judy Layne as Nancy and South Africa's well-known child prodigy, Howard Sacks, as the Artful Dodger. Young Roy Quinn (replaced on tour by Jeremy Fogg) played Oliver, and the show repeated its London success.

In May, the great twentieth-century composer, Igor Stravinsky came to Johannesburg with his amanuensis, the musician Robert Craft. The gala concerts, at which the aged Stravinsky, seated on a stool, conducted his own work, were sell-outs. We put extra seats in every conceivable corner of the City Hall, including on the stage, and could have sold them twice over. The concerts were uniquely stirring and the audience response ecstatic.

Theatre, too, was very much in evidence. Dame Flora Robson, in her sixtieth birthday year, came back to play in *The Corn is Green* for Leonard. Brook Williams took the role originated by the play's author, his father Emlyn; the distinguished Israeli director Albert Ninio from the Habimah Theatre came at the invitation of the Reps to direct John Steinbeck's *Burning Bright* and Saul Levitt's *The Andersonville Trial*, both starring Cordon Mulholland. Joe Stewardson, soon to be a frequent player of leading roles,
made his first major appearance in Levitt's play. Reviews were good, but both plays lost money for the Reps, as - more surprisingly - did Minna Schneier's production of *Boeing-Boeing*, the English version of a French bedroom farce which was enjoying a very long run in London.

Also for the Reps, Cecil Williams directed *Guilty Party*. It proved to be his last production before his politics forced him into permanent exile. Needing to recoup their losses, the Reps remembered that they held the rights to Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*. This hoary old 'country house' thriller (in its forty-fifth year in London at the time of writing) came to the rescue, as did Ricky Arden's end-of-year production, *Come Blow Your Horn*. This Neil Simon comedy starred Jewish actors Fyvel Zygielbaum and Sarah Sylvia, with Gordon Mulholland, Clive Parnell and Jane Fenn, and did very good business.

In Cape Town, the Cockpit Players began what was to be their last year of operation with *Two for the Seesaw*, starring Fiona Fraser and John Hayter. Leonard's prior production, which had opened in December 1961, was a musical revue called *Something New*, with John Boulter and a much-loved British comedienne Beryl Reid.

Early in 1962 the show came to Johannesburg, where the warm-hearted and extrovert Beryl gave special performances for 'Non-European' audiences and was gratified by their response. She was also gratified by the royal hospitality she was accorded everywhere. In Johannesburg, Leonard gave a party in Beryl's honour.
Socialite Iva Schlesinger was present, wearing an attention-getting white dress which appeared to be made up of rows of tasselled fringes which shook every time she moved. In the course of the evening, concert pianist Adelaide Newman accidentally, or possibly intentionally, spilt a glass of red wine over Iva, ruining the dress and sending its wearer into a fit of hysteria. The rest of us found this extremely funny, and I felt that *Something New* could have done with the incident as part of the show because, in truth, it was rather short on laughs.

As early as March, the *Sunday Times* had published a feature headlined 'A Show Business Boom In South Africa' and, indeed, by the beginning of June, the boom showed no signs of bust. The flow of visiting artists continued, including a tour by the most famous mime artist in the world, Marcel Marceau, presented by the National Theatre in collaboration with Taubie Kushlick. At the Playhouse, Leonard Schach directed Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, followed by Tennessee Williams' *The Night of the Iguana*. In Leonard's company of actors for these plays were Siegfried Mynhardt, Michael McGovern, Margaret Inglis, Marjorie Gordon, Diane Wilson and Kerry Jordan, all among the best the country had to offer. Both plays were compelling works, produced to the highest standard but, alas, they proved too esoteric for a public looking to the frivolous and did not do too well.

Sadder to relate, with these plays, Leonard Schach's
lease of the Playhouse ended, and so did the Cockpit Players. The company had provided South Africa with twelve years of largely memorable theatregoing, during which Leonard had introduced us to the works of many eminent playwrights. The Playhouse itself limped along for another year, a much-needed venue that ended up a white elephant.

Also in June, out of the blue came the announcement that the National Theatre Organization was to be disbanded. This was a major blow to the theatre profession, and met with protest from its leading lights, particularly those such as Leontine Sagan and Lean Gluckman who had had a close association with the NTO since its inception. However, it was indicated that government-funded theatre would be reinstated in another form and, indeed, the following year would see the start of the performing arts councils with the formation of PACT.

Jim Reeves was something of a phenomenon. His voice, often described as 'velvety', was pleasing but monotonous, his doleful, dirge-like love songs even more so. In 1953 this guitar-strumming Texas farm boy hit the Country-and-Western charts with the release of his first record, 'Mexican Joe', and by 1962, with such songs as 'Where Does a Broken Heart Go', 'Four Walls' and 'He'll Have to Go', he had become a major heart-throb. His appearances were guaranteed sell-outs.

In June, I signed a contract with the Teal Record
Company for Show Service to handle a Jim Reeves tour here in August. The singer would be accompanied by pianist Floyd Cramer and guitarist Chet Atkins, both high-profile performers. I undertook responsibility for all the arrangements, including promotion and public relations, accommodation, and the booking and co-ordination of venues, as well, of course, as the ticket sales, which were expected to be substantial.

Gerald McGrath, the managing director of Teal, wrote me a confirmatory letter, emphasising his company's high expenditure on the Reeves tour, and stating that, since Show Service was being employed on the basis of its expertise, he expected assurances regarding our ability to deal with a task of this magnitude. Mr McGrath's tone was, to say the least, patronising and admonitory, and I came to wish I'd said 'thanks, but no thanks'.

The Reeves dates coincided with those of a British Lions rugby tour, and it was exceptionally difficult to find available venues and hotel accommodation. It was clear that the work was too much for one person, and I engaged Ruth Hooper to assist me. We worked like Trojans, but our efforts brought only carping criticism from Gerald.

Although I was ready to strangle him, my professional pride drove my determination to make the Reeves visit a memorable success, starting with the welcome arrangements which, I hoped, would outdo even those of my one-time role model, Jimmy MacKenzie. Having organised the red-carpet routine with the airport
AUTHORITIES, WE PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED A COUPLE OF HUNDRED THOUSAND LEAFLETS ADVISING FANS OF THE FLIGHT DETAILS, AND HAD PHOTOGRAPHS OF JIM MADE TO HAND OUT. Teal Records organised spot radio bulletins, and we published maps in the daily papers giving the route that the Reeves 'convoy' would take into the city. If this seems excessive, it must be remembered that Jim Reeves' mass popularity here and in the States, was almost on a par with that of Elvis Presley or the Beatles.

COME THE DAY, THE RESPONSE SURPASSED ALL EXPECTATION. Crowds had lined the entire route between the Carlton Hotel and Jan Smuts Airport, and thousands of fans were sandwiched behind the fences outside the arrivals hall, waiting for their hero. When the plane finally landed, and the other passengers had disembarked, Gerald and I went out to the tarmac to welcome the visitors and warn them of what to expect.

After clearing them rapidly through the formalities, we escorted Jim, with Floyd Cramer and Chet Atkins, out to the fences to greet the waiting crowds. At the sight of Reeves, hysteria broke out and extra police had to be called in to control the mob, whose presence was threatening to disable the running of the airport. We ran the gauntlet to get the boys into the waiting cars and, as we finally approached town, some light relief was provided by a spectator holding a large banner reading, 'JIM Reeves FLOYD into Johannesburg by CHET plane'.

Amusement was short-lived. The chauffeur turned into
Percy Tucker

Eloff Street to find an almost impassable wall of waiting bodies. The frenzied crowds mobbed the car, pushing it from side to side. Even Jim Reeves had never coped with anything quite like this and was clearly petrified. We stopped the car some way before the Carlton Hotel and decided to make a run for it, but this wasn't much help: at the hotel entrance, Jim had the lining of his expensive golden-brown silk suit ripped to shreds in a skirmish with excited fans; worse still, when we finally pushed our way into the building his diamond ring was no longer on his finger.

Understandably furious, Reeves stormed into his suite and refused to speak to the waiting press. I could do absolutely nothing about this. Chet and Floyd were still attempting to get through the crowds, but at least they weren't manhandled. By early evening the crowds had dispersed, and an air of comparative normalcy returned to the Carlton. Thankful to get away, Ruth and I left Gerald's team from Teal in charge of the artists until the next morning.

Walking into the Carlton foyer a couple of days later, I was called over by the manager of the hotel's CNA kiosk. While clearing a pile of books off the floor, he had found a diamond ring and wanted to know whether it was Jim's missing treasure. I took him up to the singer's apartment where, for the first time since his arrival, I saw a smile on Reeves' face. We concluded that when the ring was pulled off, it must have slid across the marble floor of the foyer and
finished up at the newsagent.

These were only the first of several incidents I could well have done without. After Jim's opening concert (at Ellis Park where, for want of a venue, the tennis courts had been converted into a concert 'stadium') we were having drinks in his suite when his manager took me aside and asked whether I could get hold of a girl for the star - not any girl mind, but a young one, no older than sixteen. It was the first time I'd ever had such a request and was both startled and a little shocked. I informed the manager in no uncertain terms that procuring wasn't my line.

I came to realise that life for a performer on tour, far from home and family and living out of suitcases, is a very lonely affair. Johannesburg was, and is, a particularly hostile city and, in time I took to inviting the artists out and making sure they were never left to be miserable, particularly over a weekend. By 1962 I had given up my flat in favour of hotels - first the Waldorf and then the Rand International. This was convenient, not only for access to my office and to theatres but left me free of domestic concerns and gave me a ready-made facility for entertaining artists. I continued this way of life until the late Sixties, when I was able to entertain jointly with my friend Graham Dickason, a distinguished figure in the financial community.

I had no ulterior motives in befriending these often sensitive and insecure souls, but I was nevertheless rewarded for my pains by the friendships I made with
several people whom I consider it a privilege to have known, among them Margot Fonteyn, Richard Tucker, pianist Jorge Bolet, and Marlene Dietrich. Jim Reeves was never a personal friend - the exigencies of the tour saw to that - but he was thoroughly professional in performance and in his conduct of our brief daily meetings- and, of course, I could hardly blame him for the fact that I didn't have time to attend any of the British Lions rugby matches!

The Bloemfontein concert presented me with the worst nightmare of the Reeves assignment. On the afternoon of the concert, the Lions had played a test match against South Africa in the city's best stadium, leaving us to an inferior stadium with virtually no facilities. And Gerald McGrath had had the 'bright' idea of giving a ticket allocation to all the music shops in the district.

Quite apart from the fact that these shops hadn't a clue about selling theatre tickets, which led to some confusion, I was left with disorganised batches of loose tickets to be handled by the cashiers at the concert. Since there were no sales desks, we were sitting in the middle of nowhere, in a little box, with money and tickets at our feet. To crown it all, Ruth Hooper and I had to rush round to all the music shops collecting the cash. The situation was, to put it mildly, chaotic, and added to my growing conviction that theatre tickets should be marketed with the same centralised efficiency as any other consumer product.

The other major headache was accommodation. We
had drawn a total blank in Bloemfontein where, it transpired, the concert venue was near the railway station. In desperation at the thought of some fifty of us with nowhere to sleep, I negotiated the hire of a train, complete with dining-car and sleeping compartments. This would be parked in a siding at Bloemfontein station and used as a 'hotel' for the night. The riotous atmosphere at the concert that night reflected the audience's euphoria over South Africa's 34-14 victory in the rugby test, as well as their enthusiasm for Jim. The fans had heightened their happiness with a generous consumption of beer, and the noise that greeted Jim was deafening.

I heard all this from my little box, where I sat miserably trying to sort out hundreds of ticket stubs while Ruth was at the train supervising the after-show accommodation. I finished at about one in the morning and headed for the train. Everything seemed remarkably quiet, and I crawled into my bunk and fell fast asleep. Half-an-hour later I was woken by a drunken chorus outside my window, serenading a person they took to be Jim Reeves, but who was actually me.

The 'well-kept' secret of Jim's whereabouts had clearly got out, and in anticipation of further disturbance I got up and went to find Ruth. She broke the news that a farmer at the concert had offered Jim, Floyd and Chet the use of his house for the night, so none of the stars was actually on the train. The chorus of revellers couldn't care less. They carried on singing for several hours.
It was with no small measure of relief that I packed the Reeves entourage off to Cape Town with Ruth Hooper and returned to the real world. Gerald McGrath’s behaviour throughout the tour was intolerable. Nonetheless, when it was over I put together a press book for him and his team at Teal. Even though publicity for an artist of Jim’s extraordinary popularity is almost self-generating, I was frankly amazed at the massive amount of coverage we had received. Gerald claimed all the credit for the success of the Reeves visit, and neither Ruth nor I received a word of thanks for our pains.

The following year Jim Reeves returned to South Africa to make the film *Kimberley Jim*. While here, he made a record called 'Jy is My Liefling', for which he learned the Afrikaans phonetically. Its sixteen tracks include such numbers as 'Sarie Marais' and 'Nooientjie van die Ou Transvaal', and was still selling over thirty years later.

On 1 August 1964, Jim Reeves was killed when the light aircraft in which he was flying to Nashville ran into a storm and crashed. He was forty years old.
Sophie Tucker, wearing the new wardrobe and hairdo she had told me about in Las Vegas, played at the Colosseum. The show was great, and we enjoyed some jolly excursions in and around the city. At the Empire, audiences were entertained by British crooner Dickie Valentine, and it was during the 1960s that I met another Dickie, popular British comedian Dickie Henderson, through his friend and mine, Jack Schneider.

A most interesting character, Jack was married to my great friend in childhood (and to this day) Rhoda Jankelowitz, who was also born in Princes Avenue, Benoni. Jack had worked his way round the world doing a variety of jobs, even managing a stint as a Hollywood extra, but had had pretensions to being a ballet dancer, despite his rugby-forward physique which looked rather odd in leotard and tights.

The zenith and nadir of his short-lived ballet career occurred simultaneously, when he was partnering Daphne Madeley (daughter of Benoni's Labour MP, Waiter Madeley) in Marjorie Sturman's company. At a certain moment in the piece, Daphne leapt through the air into Jack's waiting arms, whereupon he slipped and fell to the floor taking Daphne with him. The incongruous sight
reduced the audience to fits of laughter once they realised nobody was hurt. After Jack dropped Daphne, Miss Sturman dropped Jack, but his great love for the performing arts remained intact, and he and Rhoda often threw open their beautiful home to me and the visiting artists I chaperoned.

The sophisticated and flamboyant actor, designer and writer Michéal MacLiammóir, a self-created Irishman (born Alfred Willmore) and co-founder of Dublin's Gate Theatre, came for Taubie Kushlick, in conjunction with the National Theatre, in his one-man show about Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Oscar*. He was very easy to get on with, full of Irish blarney, and had a fund of witty stories. Michéal adored Taubie from the moment he met her, so much so that he described her in detail in his autobiography, calling her ‘quite the most vibrant personality of the South African stage', and wrote admiringly of 'her laughter, her tyranny, her sudden intuitions, her imperious ring-tapping on the table, her firm denial of all failure, or sadness or tragedy'. It is as vivid a picture of the unforgettable Mrs Kushlick as one is ever likely to get, but I can't help wondering what he'd have thought of an incident at her dinner table, noticed only by me.

It was a lively evening, and while Michéal was in full flood at Kushy's end of the table, an enormous exotic fruit salad was brought in for dessert and placed in front of Taubie, on whose right I was sitting. It was well-known that
Kushy was always ritually served first, but as Taubie took up her silver serving spoon, the guest opposite me had a coughing fit which dislodged his dental plate neatly into the middle of the fruit salad. A quick glance round the table from Taubie confirmed that only I and the unfortunate owner of the false teeth had noticed and, with a conspiratorial wink at me, she announced that on this occasion, Michéal would be served first and Kushy last. She brazenly served all the guests but me, the owner of the teeth and Kushy, then swept into the kitchen with the bowl and the offending guest. All three returned a couple of minutes later, and the hostess again took up her spoon ...

Children’s Theatre were active with four productions, including James Ambrose Brown’s *Amelia’s African Adventure*. James had emerged as the most prolific of South African playwrights, albeit largely with material for youngsters. Mercedes Molina gave her by now regular season of Spanish dance, and Ben ‘Sach’ Masinga wrote the first all-Zulu jazz musical, *Back in Your Own Backyard*. Only the residents of Soweto got to see it, while white audiences continued to fill the Brooke Theatre, whose season included *The Irregular Verb to Love* starring its author, the West End actor and playwright Hugh Williams.

Margaret Inglis, a widow since the death of her husband Sam Leith (the famous chef and restaurateur Prue Leith is their daughter), had recently married Brian Brooke’s former production manager, Robert Langford, and together they founded a new company. Their first
production was a revival of *Gaslight* at the Library Theatre.

During the last week of June 1962, at the annual general meeting of British Actors Equity in London, members voted in favour of a motion declaring that British artists should not play to segregated audiences in South Africa. This understandable expression of hostility cast a pall of gloom over those managements here who understood the value of importing British actors. Leonard Schach, regretting this turn of events, said, 'The decision is not logical. If Equity wants to be consistent, then they must ban all imported English plays, not to mention films in which British actors appear ...'

Indeed, it would only take another year for a playwrights' ban to be imposed, a ban that turned out far more damaging in the long run than the sanctions on actors which, in any event, were defied by large numbers of them. Nevertheless, it was clear that the consequences for the theatre of apartheid policy could no longer be ignored.

Meanwhile, I was caught up with bookings for the first season of shows at the Johannesburg Civic Theatre. This much-discussed and long-awaited emblem of civic pride was welcomed as especially valuable to the enhancement of opera, ballet and musicals companies, freeing them from the stranglehold of ACT; it was also intended as a spacious, well-equipped addition to the still limited venues for drama.

Designed by Manfred Hermer and financed by the
Johannesburg City Council, the Civic was run by a committee of councillors, with the day-to-day administration in the hands of Michal Grobbelaar, formerly production manager for the National Theatre. It was with Michal that I signed the contract for Show Service to take charge of the Civic’s booking arrangements, and for the next thirty-two years he and I remained in daily communication.

The inaugural season at the new theatre was to commence with a season of three operas under the auspices of the South African Opera Federation, a group of influential music lovers under the patronage of several other dignitaries, who raised sponsorship for professional opera. The works were *The Tales of Hoffman* (in Afrikaans) with Mimi Coertse on leave from Vienna; *The Masked Ball* with Emma Scheepers (later Emma Renzi), on leave from Karlsruhe, and Italy's Piero Cappucilli; and *Hansel and Gretel* with Jossie Boshoff and Doris Brasch.

Drama would follow opera, with Kushlick-Gluckman's production of *A Man for All Seasons* directed by Margaret Webster, and Bartho Smit's Afrikaans translation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*, directed by Fred Engelen with Anna Neethling-Pohl. Frank Loesser's Broadway musical *The Most Happy Fella* would be staged by JODS, then ballet would have its turn with the Johannesburg City Ballet's production of *Coppelia*, danced by Maryon Lane and David Blair, with Dudley Davies directing. The season would end with the 'Festival of Light Music' presented by
Percy Tucker

the SABC Orchestra with Eve Boswell. The programme read like a mini festival, which would take the Civic to the end of the year and keep Show Service rewardingly busy.

Johannesburg's first-nighters faced a bitterly cold journey to the Civic Theatre on the evening of 27 August for the gala opening, to which I took Pamela Gluckman. A further damper was put on the evening by the speeches which were rather formal, dry and long-winded. However, *The Tales of Hoffman* was compensation enough, with Mimi Coertse excelling herself as all three of Offenbach's women: the mechanical doll Olympia, the temptress Giulietta and the doomed Antonia. When we emerged into the night after the opera, the city and its new building wore a magic blanket of snow - a rare sight which faded the next day.

Robert Bolt's award-winning *A Man for All Seasons* had proved a huge popular success in London, was running to acclaim on Broadway and would be filmed in 1966 with Paul Scofield, winning six Academy Awards. Set in the reign of Henry VIII, this politico-religious historical drama about spiritual conflict and betrayal focused on the Roman Catholic cardinal Sir Thomas More. It was a perfect choice for the opening play at the Civic: literate, gripping, even witty.

Taubie and Leon brought William Roderick from England to play Sir Thomas, a role he had taken over from Scofield in London and on tour, and invited Margaret
Webster to come from New York to direct. Already known to South African audiences through her one-woman recitals from the works of Shakespeare and Shaw and her production of *A Touch of the Poet* the previous year, Miss Webster had had a substantial acting career before turning to direction. She was the first woman to have directed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the first to give Broadway a genuine black Othello in Paul Robeson.

A weighty cast was assembled, including Stuart Brown in the pivotal role of The Common Man, Philip Birkinshaw as the Duke of Norfolk, Hugh Rouse as Cromwell and Yossi Graber as the Spanish Ambassador. The sets were by the accomplished English designer, Pamela Lewis, who had been brought to this country by Brian Brooke, and the magnificent period costumes and first-class wigs were imported from London. All in all, the auguries were splendid for a production of West End standard.

On Wednesday, 26 September, we took our seats at the Civic Theatre in high expectation, little knowing that a fraught Margaret Webster was living a different drama in the lighting box. In her autobiography, *Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage*, she writes: 'I knew nothing about the working of electronic boards; as it turned out, neither did the theatre electrician. [The play] depends on swift and frequent changes of lighting to indicate total changes of mood and locale ... They never happened ... Time grew shorter and shorter; 'electrics' and I worked longer and longer. I developed an ulcer and Taubie Kushlick brought
me gelatinous substances and chicken soup ...

On the opening night 'electrics' said, 'Will you sit in the booth and help me?' Halfway through the first act 'electrics' turned to me. 'I'm lost', he said. 'What shall I do?' At this moment an angel appeared. He looked like Michal Grobbelaar ... but I knew him for an angel. He picked up the cue sheet instantly and began dictating from it. We were in business again.

Meanwhile, in the auditorium, many of us realised with mounting alarm that we could barely hear what was being said on the stage. Our handsome new Civic Theatre, it was turning out, was bedevilled with the acoustical problem known as 'dead spots', from which only the circle appeared exempt. All hell broke loose after the opening night and much press coverage was given to the rows that flared between Kushlick-Gluckman and Pieter Roos, chairman of the Civic's committee. Leon and Taubie threatened to sue the Civic; Roos maintained, insultingly, that inaudibility was the fault of the actors and nobody else. Manfred Hermer was called in and denied any possibility of flaws in the building. While the bitter controversy raged on, the bookings fell off, and anticipated success turned to failure.

I took the disappointed and angry Margaret Webster to the Game Reserve, along with Taubie and Clive Hirschhorn. We had three delightful and restorative days together, during which Peggy regaled us with her wonderful Broadway stories and read out loud from the book she'd bought on the animals we were seeing. Even Taubie shut up
during this short holiday and allowed Peggy to hold the floor.

I took a particular interest in *The Most Happy Fella*, the first musical to be staged at the Civic, since I had been instrumental in helping JODS obtain the rights. Earlier in the year, a great friend of Leon Gluckman’s named Alien Whitehead had come out from New York to see *Wait a Minim!* with an eye to its international potential. I took care of Allen in Johannesburg, which was the start of an ongoing friendship with him and his wife, Rosemary. Allen was head of Music Theatre International, whose chairman was Frank Loesser, composer of, among other hits, *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Music Theatre International was one of the largest performing rights agencies in the USA, and my relationship with Alien Whitehead and, subsequently, Frank Loesser, proved professionally invaluable.

The first of several negotiations on behalf of JODS and through the good offices of these gentlemen was for *The Most Happy Fella*, book music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, which had been enthusiastically received on Broadway.

Since musicals, unlike straight plays, are generally automatically 'miked', which helps with acoustical problems, once the Civic had run itself in, a mini-golden age of musical theatre was launched there. JODS was the only organisation outside of African Theatres capable of staging musicals because, as a non-professional, non-
profit-making organisation, they paid the leads, while the rest of the company did it for 'fun'.

In giving JODS. the rights, Alien and Frank also suggested they hire New York musical comedy actor Edwin Steffe for the lead. (His airfare was R4 75). Anthony Farmer was engaged to direct and to design the decor and costumes. The show opened on 8 November, with top-price tickets costing R2 10 and enjoyed much success.

Late in November, *My Fair Lady*, one of the great jewels in the musicals crown, came at long last to South Africa. Presented by African Theatres at the Empire, it starred Diane Todd, who would eventually settle in South Africa, as Eliza Doolittle, and David Oxley as Professor Higgins. Both stars acquitted themselves sufficiently well to avoid odious comparisons with Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison. The show played to 234 packed houses before repeating its success in Cape Town and Durban. I went to the opening night with Lean and Pam Gluckman, for which pleasure I had, believe it or not, to queue for three-and-a-half hours to get tickets!

In December I took my first winter trip to New York. I had grown a beard which proved quite helpful in warding off the bitter cold. To this end, I also bought a Russian fur hat. I spent New Year's Eve at the theatre with Tony Farmer, and afterwards we braved the freezing temperatures to join the crowds in Times Square. I became aware that an awful lot of people seemed to be looking at me rather oddly, and
eventually I said something about this to Tony. 'Well,' he said, 'have you seen yourself in a mirror lately? You look just like a KGB spy in that hat and beard with that coat.'

Despite my appearance, Sol Hurok, who was then chairman of the Fritz Kreisler Memorial Fund, had invited me to a fund-raising benefit concert for musicians at Carnegie Hall. Among the many eminent committee members to whom Sol introduced me were Leonard Bernstein, Mischa Elman, Yehudi Menuhin, Andre Kostelanetz and Leopold Stokowski. I renewed my acquaintance with Arthur Rubinstein, and met violinist Efrem Zimbalist, father of the actor Efrem Jr.

The performing musicians at the benefit were Zino Francescatti, Nathan Milstein, Erica Morini, Isaac Stern and the Juilliard Quartet. To hear them play the Vivaldi Concerto in B Minor for Four Violins was an unforgettable pleasure. So was the backstage party afterwards. Nobody commented on the beard, but I shaved it off soon after New Year.

During this trip, I renewed my acquaintance with Sergio Calli, now Sergio Franchi, who was appearing at the Rainbow Room atop the Rockefeller Center, where I took Frank Loesser to hear him. It was the first of several entertaining evenings hearing Sergio over the years. A particularly special occasion was in Las Vegas where I watched his cabaret in company with Ella Fitzgerald, and the three of us dines together. Ella was a vivacious and likeable woman, who asked me all about the South African
situation. Despite this painful topic, we got on extremely well, and I spared her the embarrassment of so much as hinting that she might like to tour the country and see for herself.

Alien Whitehead and Frank Loesser took me to a party at Stephen Sondheim's, and to a dinner with Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist John Steinbeck. They also introduced me to producer-director Elaine Perry, the daughter of Antoinette Perry after whom the Broadway Tony Awards are named. She subsequently invited me to an evening at her ravishing Park Avenue apartment where Ethel Merman was among the guests. When Frank Loesser sat down at Elaine's piano and played his hit songs, Ethel leapt up and let rip in that amazing ambulance-siren voice of hers. This is a cherished memory and began a relationship with Elaine Perry which later bore fruit professionally in South Africa.

From the depths of the American winter, I flew home to the height of the South African summer. In Johannesburg, Colin Fish and Leon Gluckman had jointly presented Sir Donald and Lady Wolfit (the actress Rosalind Iden) at the Playhouse in an evening of Shakespeare. Ronald Harwood, who had worked for Wolfit and later wrote his biography, is said to have based the flamboyant actor in The Dresser on Sir Donald, who was the last of the British actor-managers in the barnstorming tradition. His style was reminiscent of the nineteenth century, and to see him in the mid-twentieth century was quite an experience. The
Shakespeare recital garnered wonderful reviews, but Pat Bray had written to me in New York to report that business was abysmal. This led to Wolfit and the producers deciding to replace the programme with Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, giving the actor an opportunity to repeat one of his best-known roles - and me an opportunity to see him play it and to meet him. He was a supreme egotist with a volatile temperament, but was unconditionally in love with the theatre and took enormous pride in his work. He died in 1968, leaving his wife, who idolised him, to survive him for another twenty-two years.

Looking back on 1962 and the numerous visiting artists, Oliver Walker wrote in *The Star*: 'So long as we can keep Equity at bay we should continue to derive pleasure, enlightenment and new ideas from overseas in proof of the old adage that all the world's a stage and we, for all the isolationist attitudes of our masters, are an active part of it.'
Politically dictated contradictions abounded throughout 1963 as they would for decades to come. Despite the country’s poisoned image abroad, overseas artists in all spheres of entertainment continued to visit, while the lunacy of government decrees affecting the arts further served to confuse the issues for local managements. Apartheid laws were gradually tightening a noose around the necks of visionary men, and the country would soon lose its two most dedicated, intelligent and inspirational director-producers.

In early February, the Publications and Entertainments Bill went before Parliament, proposing the establishment of a nine-member Publications Control Board to pronounce on the 'desirability' of any publication, entertainment or work of art, whether local or imported. A sop was provided with a right of appeal to the Supreme Court.

The Bill provoked an outcry from distinguished members of the cultural establishment. Leon Gluckman pointed out that 'The terms of the intended legislation are so wide that if literally interpreted and rigidly enforced, they could have the effect of negating all creative activity in the theatre. Many modern plays ... would immediately become suspect ... even Shakespeare himself would not be
above suspicion'.

Alan Paton said, 'I fear what may happen to the freedom of the novelist and playwright, specially the Afrikaans one ... and I fear for our biographical and historical literature ... It would be terrible if one could not tell the historical truth as one sees it because it might offend some censorious big-wig'.

Author Leo Marquard noted that, 'The Bill will effectively debar us from the salutary experience of seeing ourselves as others see us. The world will laugh at us, but we shall only be able to laugh at ourselves illegally'. And from artist Waiter Battiss, 'Censorship intimidates and crushes the precious, emasculates the strong, kills in the end the very qualities we hold good. We already know what is undesirable - bad art'. Musician and entertainer Jeremy Taylor spoke for many in observing that the Bill 'can never be, in any real sense, a law, because its terms are so vague and its enforcement dependent upon the personal opinions, and prejudices doubtless, of a few fallible mortals; mortals who moreover need know nothing about art.'

Nadine Gordimer prophesied that the Bill 'will destroy the arts in this country, cripple intellect and prolong indefinitely the cultural inferiority of a frontier society from which we have just begun to emerge ... Such a society, by the inexorable law of returns, will get exactly what it has provided for: hack writing, hack painting, hack theatre. The life of the mind, in our country, will die of "safeguards"
cynically imposed to stop people thinking'.

The cries were lost in the wind. The Bill was passed, and the Control Board established.

Three major events nourished our theatrical life while, in their different ways, demonstrating the tragic absurdity of Nationalist government laws and Dutch Reformed Church morality.

During the run of the fabulously successful *Wait a Minim!*, Lean Gluckman had declared, 'I have made a packet of money out of this show. I feel now I ought to put it all back into the theatre on something I know can only lose money.' He decided to take the monumental gamble of bringing the Athens Drama Company to Johannesburg.

Costis Michaelides, the director of this eminent ensemble specialising in the Greek classical drama, had long wanted to come here and had approached the Johannesburg City Council to sponsor a visit. It was not really in the Council's gift to finance such an undertaking, but no management or impresario seriously believed that South African audiences would be drawn to plays written twenty-five centuries ago and played in Greek. Not even Lean believed it, but he was committed to the cultural ideals of such an enterprise.

On 15 May 1963, the Civic Theatre curtain rose on Euripides' tragedy, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, given by the Athenian company led by Aleka Katselis, Maria Moscholiou and Costas Kazakos, highly skilled in the traditions of their
repertoire and icons in their own country. Supported by a ritual chorus, they unveiled this great work about ambition, power and sacrifice. Most of the opening night audience had never beheld this style of theatre, and didn't understand a word of what was said.

The applause was tumultuous.

The publicity was unbelievable, and actress Aleka Katselis -who, as a schoolgirl, had been chosen to light the Olympic torch in Athens, setting it on its way to Hitler's 1936 games- was the talk of the town. Show Service was inundated with bookings, leading to a week's extension of the season and acclaimed performances in Cape Town and Rhodesia. A few nights later the company opened their second play, the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, a bawdy romp in which the women of Ancient Greece withhold their sexual favours from their husbands in order to stop them going to war. Once again, the audience was held enthralled by an evening for which most of them were intellectually and linguistically unequipped.

The visit of the Athens Company was a miracle. As I've so often seen happen in the course of my career, Johannesburg defied the rules and, far from losing his *Minim* profits, Leon Gluckman came out in the black. The critics were ecstatic in their praise of the staging and impassioned performances, and all who saw it agreed with Oliver Walker: 'Let no-one who loves theatre imagine that he will be handicapped out of sight by ignorance of the language. This is great theatre, and greatly was it
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performed.'

It is salutary to reflect that probably neither of these two plays—certainly not *Lysistrata*—would have been passed by the censorship body had its members been versed in Greek.

During a brief business trip to New York, at Pat Bray’s request I chased up the rights to Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II’s *Show Boat* for JODS, who had been trying to get them for fourteen years.

There was, of course, a major problem (or two or three) about staging *Show Boat* in 1960s South Africa: one of the themes is miscegenation; the major character of Joe, who sings ‘Ol’ Man River’, is a black man, as is the chorus of Mississippi river workers. Nonetheless, I decided to go for it and, with the help of Frank Loesser and Allen Whitehead, set up a lunch meeting with the late Oscar Hammerstein’s son, who controlled the rights to the show.

Seldom has lunching in New York been so difficult. Over the smoked salmon blinis, Mr Hammerstein expressed surprise and disbelief that a show dealing with miscegenation could even be contemplated; during the Tournedos Rossini he queried our freedom to be allowed a large cast of black performers; over the apple pie a la mode he made it clear that he wouldn’t even contemplate the idea unless the show maintained the integrity of these requirements. By the time coffee was served, I found myself recklessly agreeing to all his conditions.

I had eaten barely a morsel of the expensive lunch for
which I'd picked up the tab, but I did have permission for JODS to stage *Show Boat*. Alien Whitehead suggested we ask the New Zealand baritone Inia te Wiata to come out and play Joe. Good idea, but Te Wiata, widely experienced in both musicals and opera (he had sung at Covent Garden), was a Maori. Nonetheless, the authorities were approached and, with typical bureaucratic irrationality, granted permission on the grounds of some Scottish and Swedish ancestry in Inia's family. So far so good.

Next came the matter of the black chorus. Representations were made to the relevant government department. After due consideration, back came a suggestion straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*: the black chorus would be permitted to grace the stage of the Civic provided they were kept on a different level, physically separate from the white cast.

Anthony Farmer, contracted both to direct and design, met this request with minimal difficulty. Since, in any event, the 'black' sequences were largely self-contained, the almost naturally differentiated levels of boat and jetty, plus an ingenious, slightly raised ramp, met the letter of the law.

The African Capedium Choir was contracted. Its members were all amateurs with day jobs, and the nightmarish logistics of getting them to and fro for rehearsals brought echoes of the *King Kong* days. The white cast was headed by Ronnie Shelton as Gaylord Ravenal, Marie Van Zyl as Magnolia, and Olive King as the half-caste Julie. Since it was impossible physically to separate
Queenie, the black family retainer, from the white characters, she was played by a blacked-up Shirley Arden.

Tony designed one of his best sets, building a three-storey river boat with multiple interiors. During its journey up river, audiences saw different sections of the exterior until, at the grand finale, the entire boat, magically illuminated, 'sailed' right across the stage, its wheel churning through real water to rapturous applause. Throughout, the river could be seen in the background, the water tanks that supplied it ingeniously concealed.

The queues at Show Service told me JODS had a major success on its hands. We were selling at least three thousand tickets a day in advance bookings and I could see that the season would be sold out rapidly. I suggested to Pat Bray that she try and make immediate arrangements for a re-run - there were certainly going to be enough unlucky patrons to merit this. The Civic was able to offer a space the following February, and Inia, whose rendition of 'Ol Man River' was competing with Tony's boat as the show's highlight, agreed to return.

With these arrangements in place, I organised a continuous booking system so that, with the run sold out, customers were able to book there and then for the re-run four months away. After the second season in 1964, JODS took Show Boat to African Theatre's Cape Town venue, the Alhambra, where the coloured Eoan group replaced the Capedium Choir. This huge and grand old theatre, however, didn't have the technical facilities to sail the
complete boat across the stage. Undaunted, Tony redesigned it to open out like a concertina and close up again. Cape Town, too, loved the show.

The third major theatrical event of the year, and the first to fall foul of the new theatre censorship, was Taubie Kushlick's presentation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Taubie had fought her way through many obstacles to get the rights to Edward Albee's play while it was still causing a sensation on Broadway, and had contractually agreed that it would play only to multi-racial audiences. This left her with a paucity of venues, and what is an intimate, not to say claustrophobic, drama, involving only four characters in one room, was forced to play in the Port Elizabeth City Hall (where it opened), an Indian theatre in Durban and, finally, the huge University Great Hall in Johannesburg.

Black, bleak, blasphemous and sometimes scathingly funny, Albee's play about a young academic couple who get drawn into the vitriolic, adversarial relationship of a university professor and his wife broke new ground in its stark examination of these two characters, George and Martha (Burton and Taylor in the 1966 film), and the venom of their language. It's compelling, powerful, absorbing. Local theatregoers flocked to see visiting Americans Jerome Kilty and Cavada Humphrey (familiar from their successful tour of *Dear Liar* for Kushlick-Gluckman), ably supported by Fred Sadoff, also from the States, and English actress Karel Gardner.

The whole town was talking about *Who's Afraid of*
Virginia Woolf? and money was pouring into the box-office, when the Control Board stepped in. A woman in Port Elizabeth, having picketed the theatre in an effusion of moral outrage at the language, had subsequently organised a spate of protest letters. This resulted in a telegram - which, in a typical piece of bureaucratic ineptitude was sent to Taubie's niece, Edith Kushlick- ordering the closure of the play. Edith returned the telegram to the Post Office, disclaiming any knowledge of who Taubie might be, thus delaying the inevitable for a few days, but causing the police to arrive at the theatre to stop the performance.

Next morning I drove the distraught and furious Mrs Kushlick to Pretoria where we met with Senator de Klerk (father of the future president) to protest this action. Neither his courtesy nor his smiling demeanour slipped for an instant while he told us that blasphemous language would not be tolerated on a South African stage. He admitted that he had neither read nor seen the play, but would not be budged despite the fact that the run was nearing its close. (It turned out that the P.E. woman responsible for this disgraceful ban hadn't seen it either).

Taubie was left with no choice but to comply with the Senator's ruling, and Show Service had to organise refunds. The ban made world news, serving further to damage South Africa's image in international cultural circles.

I once again found myself providing my panacea for all ills, taking Taubie, Jerome and Cavada to the Game Reserve to recover from their shock and disappointment and escape
media attention. This turned out to be one of my less happy curative safaris. In Albee's play George and Martha seldom let up screaming abuse at one other, and the journey to Sabi became a continuation of the play. I wasn't very surprised when the Kiltys later divorced. In truth, Cavada was a gentle, nervous soul and Jerry a monster.

The other crisis with which I was involved in 1963 was the visit of American singer Connie Francis. Michael Klisser, the promoter who brought her here, found himself financially strapped and appealed to me for assistance. I adamantly refused to part with any advance takings, but finally agreed to a concession whereby I would give him the takings at 8 p.m. every night for the show that was about to commence.

At 8 p.m. on the opening night at Ellis Park Tennis Stadium, as compere Michael McGovern began his opening gambit, I handed the money to Michael Klisser and slipped into the back stands. McGovern made his exit, but instead of Miss Francis making her entrance, an unscheduled announcement of a twenty-minute interval came over the tannoy. Connie Francis refused to speak to anybody and Mr Klisser had vanished. So had the money.

After twenty minutes Michael McGovern reappeared to announce that the star had laryngitis and would be unable to appear. I rushed up to him and asked him to tell the audience to keep their tickets for use at a replacement concert to be arranged, praying that this off-the-cuff solution could be made a reality.
Once again, I became an unofficial impresario. The only way to rescue the Connie Francis tour was to take it over. The singer behaved quite well and left on tour having agreed to return to Ellis Park. Something told me to follow her to Cape Town, whereupon I learnt from members of the orchestra that she had no intention of fulfilling her Johannesburg obligations. I said nothing, but kept an eagle eye on the lady who, while I was supervising the luggage on our arrival back at Jan Smuts, disappeared into an airline booking office.

I followed, and heard her request flights to London for herself and her entourage for that night. I leapt into a taxi and went to Kempton Park Police Station where I explained the situation and contacted my lawyers. They pulled out all the stops to get a judgement obliging her to fulfil her contractual obligations to me, while the police kept one very unhappy entertainer under constant surveillance in her hotel. *The Star* headlines blazoned 'Hollywood Star Arrested', a story that was picked up by the overseas press. The long-delayed concert took place the following night and, thanks to the unlooked for publicity, was packed. Connie stormed onto the stage, inwardly raging, sang eight songs, and stormed off. The audience seemed reasonably satisfied, while I was deliriously happy to see the back of her.

The year’s other events passed without incident but served to provide a wide choice of entertainment for the town and, in several cases, the country. Classical music
lovers were treated to a constant supply of visiting soloists and ensembles by Musica Viva and the Johannesburg Musical Society. Among them were pianists Michel Bloch and Shura Cherkassky, the French Wind Quintet and the Hungarian Quartet, and violinists Tibor Varga and Gyorgy Pauk. Gyorgy became a friend and one of my future house guests. He was exceptionally easy to accommodate since his only requirement during the day was to practise behind closed blinds (fortunately, my neighbours were out at work), and on performance days he fasted, so I didn't even have to think much about providing meals.

In startling contrast to the classical musicians, the twang-guitar singer Duane Eddy, sharing the bill with another Nashville star, John D. Loudermilk drew large crowds to the Civic, as did German pop singer Freddy Quinn, billed just as 'Freddy', with trumpeter Eddie Calvert in the line-up. I was in charge of Freddy's Transvaal tour, and found myself once again visiting every obscure town on the platteland - so obscure, that Klerksdorp felt like New York!

Cliff Richard and the Shadows came on their second tour -more hysteria- and a sixteen-year-old North London schoolgirl named Helen Shapiro, whose deep voice, great sense of rhythm and chart-topping number 'Walking Back to Happiness' had shot her to fame at the age of fourteen, drew massive audiences to the Colosseum.

During a stopover in France in 1962, I had seen a group
of dancers of Russian extraction performing in a modest café in Normandy. I was sure their programme of exciting traditional Russian dance, and nostalgic song favourites such as 'Black Eyes', not to mention skilful musicians playing the balalaika, would be terrifically popular in South Africa. I alerted Hymie Udwin, for many years an executive at African Consolidated Theatres, who had formed his own company, Theatre International.

My suggestion bore fruit in December 1963 when Hymie launched his new management with my Franco-Russian artists, their ranks swelled to twenty-four and called, by Hymie, the Caucanas Russian Dance Ensemble. Tony Farmer and David Morrison designed very simple but effective sets evoking the onion domes of Moscow, and this vibrant, attractive troupe enjoyed a successful three-week run at the Civic.

An important addition to the Johannesburg theatrical scene was the arrival of the multi-talented husband-and-wife team, Joan Brickhill and Louis Burke. After many years of running a theatre academy (from which emerged many future household names) and mounting shows in Durban, they had decided to move to Johannesburg. The decision was instigated by an invitation from Roy Cooke to bring their marvellous production of *Oklahoma!* to the Alexander.

Cooke's perspicacity resulted in a sold-out run of seventeen weeks, taking the show into the new year and saving the Reps from imminent financial disaster. On 10 January 1964, during the run, Muriel Alexander celebrated
her eightieth birthday. I was invited to the performance at which this tireless theatre-lover was wheeled on to the stage in 'the surrey with the fringe on the top' to cut her birthday cake, while we, the audience, sang a heartfelt 'Happy Birthday'.

More modestly, the Reps offered their customary full programme, which included two plays directed by Ricky Arden. Ricky's wife, the model Kay Dewdney, had jumped to her death from the top of Metropolitan Heights in Hillbrow. He had shown courage in dealing with this terrible tragedy, and eventually moved to the States to teach. In his production of Policy for Murder, Estelle Kohler played her last role in South Africa before leaving for London, where her career has included stints with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Margaret Inglis and Robert Langford had starred in The Physicists for the Reps, a joint management venture which lost a fortune. They tried again on their own, with a revival of Noel Coward's Private Lives starring Robert with Shelagh Holliday, one of our most useful actresses: tall, rangy, talented, and 'English' in style and manner.

At the Brooke, Brian continued his policy of solid commercial entertainment with The Sound of Music, starring Heather Lloyd-Jones as the postulant nun made famous by Julie Andrews; Heather also starred in the comedy Mary, Mary, and John Hayter and Shirley Firth appeared in Pyjama Tops. For this last, Brian took the Playhouse because the Brooke was tied up with a record-
breaking run of Ron Shanin's amazing African film about volcanoes, *Rivers of Fire and Ice*. Sixteen years later, Pieter Toerien would revive *Pyjama Tops*, taking advantage of a freer moral climate, which kept the play running for seventeen months.

In the midst of all this activity, I received a letter from Joy Adamson, the Austrian-born animal lover who had dedicated her life to raising lions. The most famous of these was Elsa the lioness (whose story was told in Mrs Adamson's book, *Born Free*). Joy Adamson was touring the world to raise funds for her lion projects, and was offering her illustrated lecture to South Africa. I approached Hymie Udwin with the idea and, like me, he felt this one couldn't miss. He booked her for main venues throughout the country.

At her first lecture, Mrs Adamson stepped onto the podium at the Civic and began to speak of her beloved Elsa, showing some rather amateurish slides of the famous animal. Within a minute or two, my heart sank as I sensed—rightly, alas—another fiasco. Joy Adamson was a highly emotional woman and began to cry at every mention of Elsa. She would compose herself but, as soon as another slide of the lioness appeared, would burst into tears again. In between this embarrassingly lachrymose display, she would attempt to deliver her talk at high speed and in a pronounced Austrian accent which rendered her words practically indecipherable.

The tour was hastily cut short, but, her unfortunate
personality notwithstanding, Joy's tenacity where her lions were concerned was fierce. She succeeded in meeting a lot of rich and important people here, and raised a large sum of money for her cause. To do justice to this fascinatingly difficult woman, she wrote me a glowing letter of thanks for having introduced her to Hymie and several sources of funding.

The most significant development across the country was the formation of the provincial performing arts councils, replacing the disbanded National Theatre and established to cater for all aspects of the performing arts. In 1963, with CAPAB, NAPAC and PACOFS following suit, PACT was launched as the flagship of the scheme, and had a very active first year of operation. John Fernald, the principal of Britain's most famous drama school, the Royal Academy, directed Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* at the Alexander, starring his wife Jenny Laird, plus two Mynhardtss - Siegfried and Patrick - Arthur Hall, Estelle Kohler and Fiona Fraser. At the Civic, Victor Melleney directed Sean O'Casey's *Playboy of the Western World*, and at Christmas, Siegfried Mynhardt directed the famous Ben Travers farce, *Rookery Nook*. Among plays for their Afrikaans company (TRUK), Richard Daneel directed a translation of Jean Anouilh's *Romeo and Jeanette*, and Melleney *Lokval Vir 'n Man Alleen* (*Trap For a Lonely Man*).

Despite her declarations to the contrary after the *Man for All Seasons* disaster, Taubie ventured back to the Civic
with C.P. Snow's *The Affair*. This time, however, she staged the entire play (which is set in a Cambridge University college) on the front apron of the stage over the orchestra pit, avoiding the acoustic problem. This time, too, it was PACT’s money at stake rather than her own.

The first PACT season of opera and ballet offered something for everyone. With a company of singers that included Emma Renzi, Nellie du Toit, Dawie Couzyn, Jossie Boshoff and Wolfgang Anheisser, the Civic hosted *The Marriage of Figaro* (with an Afrikaans libretto), *Tosca* and, directed by Taubie, a double bill of *Susannah’s Secret* and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*.

Ballet Transvaal, soon to be renamed and incorporated as PACT Ballet, produced *Giselle* and *Capriccio* with Patricia Miller, Gary Burne, and visiting French ballerina Yvette Chauvire. Gary Burne, on vacation from the Royal Ballet, accepted the offer to become principal male dancer and ballet master for PACT. Beryl Grey returned to guest in *Swan Lake* with Burne, directed by the great Russian Vera Volkova, by then attached to the Royal Danish Ballet.

Phyllis Spira joined the company and formed a dancing partnership with Burne which always guaranteed a full house. At the end of 1964, the Transvaal lost this world-class pair to CAPAB where Phyllis became prima ballerina and later ballet mistress. Sadly, Gary, ill for some time, committed suicide in 1976, aged forty-two.

In August 1963, a Durban producer named Des Morley
had brought *The King and I* to the Empire Theatre. At the end of the year, a little piece in the *Sunday Chronicle* reported that Morley was negotiating to sell his rights to *The Sound of Music, Kiss Me Kate, and Call Me Madam* to a Cape Town man named Pieter Toerien. I had never heard of him, but I wouldn't remain in ignorance for long.
Pieter Toerien, a stage-struck Capetonian still in his late teens, was already something of an impresario in his home town. Standing in on the manager’s days off at the Pinewood Cinema in Pinelands, he found common ground with the cinema’s owner Basil Rubin, and became involved in presenting bio-vaudeville programmes -live entertainment preceding the film- which proved very popular, especially with charity organisations. By the time Des Morley’s offer of musicals (rejected) came along, young Toerien was officially in partnership with his former boss.

Basil Rubin, a wine chemist and the son of a cinema owner, had given up the lab to carry on the family tradition and had turned the Pinewood into Cape Town’s first art house cinema with considerable success. Recognising Toerien’s acumen and sharing his enthusiasm, he formed Toerien and Rubin, and bio-vaudeville gave way to variety shows topped by visiting British artists such as vocalists Alma Cogan and Dickie Valentine. These were booked on their behalf by Hugo Keleti in Johannesburg, who represented Britain’s biggest entertainment agency, the Grade Organisation.

In 1964 I worked for the first time with Pieter Toerien,
the youngest impresario I had ever encountered. I quickly came to respect him, recognising that his extreme youth was no impediment to one of the shrewdest brains in the theatre business, and I grew to treasure his friendship and his generous hospitality, which have continued beyond our thirty-two-year professional relationship and my retirement. Pieter's uncanny instinct for judging the public taste has found expression in a variety of plays and shows mounted at the four theatres he owns.

He has, uniquely, backed all his hundreds of productions himself and, in August 1996, launched a new chapter in South African history, presenting an imported production of *Les Miserables* at the Nico Malan Theatre in Cape Town. This finally brought South Africa in line with the rest of the world, whose capitals had played host to producer Sir Cameron Mackintosh's infinitely long-running musical.

Show Service came into the Toerien-Rubin picture when, in February 1964, the partnership's first foray into Johannesburg was the climax of a tour by the British pianist Russ Conway. I was intrigued to learn that in his early days Conway had been an accompanist to Gracie Fields, the lady I held responsible for my lifelong conversion to live entertainment.

A London Palladium headliner and an immensely popular TV and recording star overseas, Russ emulated his success in Johannesburg, where the rest of the town joined the large British expatriate community in flocking to his
concerts. Unlike the booking for plays, which tends to spread through the run, concert bookings necessarily draw all the customers at the beginning, and the turnout for Russ Conway attracted such huge queues that the entrances to shops were obstructed right around the block and the police were called in.

At this time, Show Service acquired another new client, also from Cape Town, the redoubtable Quibell brothers. They were building contractors who had strayed into the entertainment business via the cinemas and theatres they built on land they owned. One of these was the Luxurama, another the Three Arts. The active 'impresario' was Ronnie Quibell who, for years to come, would battle against- and often defy the restrictions of the apartheid laws to manoeuvre imported pop and rock musicians, often black, onto South African stages. The Luxurama functioned as Cape Town's answer to the Wits Great Hall in admitting multi-racial audiences, but Ronnie constantly bemoaned the lack of suitable Johannesburg venues for his concerts- with good reason.

I was asked to handle the Quibells' first imported show, a short tour by Brian Poole and the Tremeloes of 'Twist and Shout' fame, but the Johannesburg concerts were unsuccessful. The venue problem had been dealt with by taking the Olympia Ice Rink for an afternoon and an evening performance, at which these attractive young British musicians were sabotaged by the poor sightlines, uncomfortable chairs, teeth-chattering temperature and,
worst of all, appalling acoustics. The third concert was staged at the City Hall at midnight, a concept so foreign to local audiences that hardly anyone turned up.

On the legitimate theatre front, Joan Brickhill and Louis Burke quickly established themselves as a significant force in Johannesburg. In April, to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, they presented an inventive production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Alexander Theatre, using beautiful *a capella* music, and chalked up a seven-week run, an unprecedented record for Shakespeare here. This was especially gratifying in view of the opening night disappointment when the lights failed at interval. Stage manager Robert Lang improvised a solution with candles but, with no electricity, was unable to raise the fire curtain and the expectant audience had to go home. Oliver Walker, in his review, was left to remark that 'half a Dream was better than no Dream'.

Later in the year, Joan and Louis broke another record with their production of Molière's *The Miser* for PACT, which was richly fulfilling its brief to provide a substantial programme of plays for the Transvaal. Starring Siegfried Mynhardt, *The Miser* was scheduled to run for nine weeks, but was so popular that it played for twenty.

While welcoming the new blood injected by Brickhill-Burke, Quibell and Toerien-Rubin, the old guard was about to lose its two most distinguished director-producers, Leon Gluckman and Leonard Schach. In April, Leon finally put
on *The Red Silk Umbrella*. Ironically, this show, whose cancellation had led to *Wait a Minim!*, was a failure. At the Alexander in September, Leonard directed *Twaalfde Nag*, a much-praised Afrikaans version of his favourite Shakespeare. Both men left South Africa with the greatest reluctance, driven out by despair at the ever-encroaching restrictions placed on their work by the apartheid system. Leonard settled in Israel but returned frequently as a guest director, while Leon and his family went to London. He never worked again in the land of his birth.

Before their departure, they most fittingly joined forces to produce *After the Fall*, with Leonard directing Leon in the lead role. This production marked the end of an era for Johannesburg.

America's leading playwright of the time, Arthur Miller, an intellectual and a political liberal who had fallen foul of the anti-Communist McCarthy investigations, had had a stormy, unhappy marriage to Marilyn Monroe. Out of the debris came *After the Fall*, whose central character, Quentin, takes an interior journey into his past, examining his ethics and his relationships, particularly his tortured liaison with the leading female character, Maggie. Despite Miller's dogged denials, it is impossible to disagree with those critics who considered the play a dramatised exposition of Miller and Monroe’s tortured marriage, a complex catharsis which made it one of the most talked-about works of the decade in intellectual and artistic circles.
Leonard Schach had been invited by director Elia Kazan, America's foremost interpreter of serious drama, to sit in on rehearsals for *After the Fall* from first reading through out-of-town tryouts to the New York opening. He wrote to me excitedly of this experience, describing Kazan as a human dynamo, probing, rigorous and committed. Even more exciting, Arthur Miller, whom Leonard had got to know well over the years, had agreed to give him the rights for South Africa, with the strict proviso that the work be played only to multi-racial audiences.

I saw *After the Fall* in New York, where it was the first production of the newly formed Repertory Theatre of the Lincoln Center. The Center was still under construction, and the company performed the play at the ANTA Washington Square Theatre, with Jason Robards Jr and Barbara Loden as Quentin and Maggie. Hal Holbrook, who had a supporting role in *After the Fall*, introduced me to Kazan, a multiple Oscar-winner who had made a star of Marlon Brando (among others) with his stage and film productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He was a wiry, rumpled and intense man with melancholy eyes, whom I would meet again in Johannesburg. I also met a young actress called Faye Dunaway ...

Gaining the rights was a major personal coup for Leonard, who would be privileged to direct the first production outside of the United States, from a script revised by Miller after the New York run. Leonard sent me the script, asking for my suggestions regarding the casting
of Quentin, which needed an accomplished actor of stature- and stamina. He is on stage for three continuous hours. My immediate choice was Leon Gluckman, whose heavy load as director and producer had kept him off the stage for some three years. Leon, though slightly nervous of so arduous a role, was keen to accept the challenge, and also voiced a desire to be a partner in the venture, suggesting that I should handle all publicity and the production accounts. Leonard agreed, and preparations began.

Erica Rogers, a Capetonian who had left home to study at RADA in 1958, had enjoyed some measure of West End success in London, notably as Coral Browne's younger self in Bonne Soupe. Leonard had never seen her work, but on the strength of a meeting in the surf at Muizenberg, he knew he had found his Maggie.

Leon was particularly pleased that the play was to be done at the University Great Hall, where his career had effectively begun with Murder in the Cathedral. He treasured the venue because, as he put it, there 'the universal values of good theatre can be enjoyed by all, without the artificial, wasteful and humiliating divisions involved in separate performances'. His farewell performance was a bitter-sweet occasion, marking that theatre's last multi-racial production for fourteen years.

Rehearsals for After the Fall were long and hard. When it opened in September, it was enthusiastically received by the critics. The successful three-week run was to be
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followed by one week - all that was available - at the Luxurama in Cape Town. Leonard, Leon and I persuaded Hymie Udwin, who had booked the Luxurama for the following week, to give up the space to us, and the play repeated its Johannesburg success.

Leonard subsequently directed four more productions of *After the Fall*: In Israel, in Brussels, the first British production (at Coventry) where Leon and Erica again played Quentin and Maggie, with support from several members of Leonard's old South African stable (Nigel Hawthorne, Joyce Grant, John McKelvey, Vivienne Drummond); and, finally, in South Africa again in 1981, as PACT's opening production at the Pretoria State Theatre. Brian Murray came from New York to play Quentin, while, once more, Erica Rogers was Maggie.

In 1966 Elia Kazan visited South Africa, and met the members of the Johannesburg Film Society Committee. I took him and his companion, Barbara Loden (the first Maggie), out to dinner and then to a concert at the Civic given by Ray Anthony and his Orchestra. I wasn't at all surprised when the jet-lagged Mr Kazan excused himself at the interval in favour of his bed. A visiting American bandleader was perhaps not the most appropriate diversion for this giant intellect of the American theatre, but I cherish the couple of hours spent with him.

Arthur Miller came to South Africa in the late Eighties and gave a lecture at a hall in Fordsburg. Chatting to him afterwards, I discussed Leonard's first production of the
play here and he spoke warmly of his visits to Leonard's home in Jaffa. Whenever I stayed with Leonard in Israel, he never failed to mention that I was occupying the 'Arthur Miller suite'.

Both *After the Fall* and Leonard's *Twaalfde Nag* were part of the 1964 Johannesburg Festival, the first since the major event of 1956, and a pale shadow of its predecessor. Having decided it was time for another festival, the City Council made elaborate arrangements for military tattoos, carnival sideshows, illuminations which they promised would rival the Christmas lights of London, and a huge pageant of floats. The celebrations would begin with a mammoth firework display at Ellis Park rugby ground and end with a Masked Arts Ball at the City Hall.

The scale of these attractions left little money available to finance the cultural aspect of the Festival, a problem that was solved by grouping all the cultural events already scheduled under the Festival banner. The only shows specially organised for the Festival were another of many visits paid by the world's most famous mime, Marcel Marceau, and a production of the operetta *Lilac Time*, starring Marion Studholme and Thomas Round, which ACT imported *in toto* from Tom Arnold in London. The former, though popular, was hardly novel, and the latter was a somewhat limp affair but, thanks no doubt to the hype, bookings were terrific across the spectrum of entertainment which, fortunately, included much of
interest and quality.

Show Service handled all bookings that fell under the Festival umbrella, with the exception of *Lilac Time*. Imagine my surprise when I read that we would be booking for the 'non-white' performances of this show. I knew nothing of this, and soon discovered that it reflected ACT’s 189 patronising attitude towards non-fashionable customers. Naturally, I took it on.

Adam Leslie staged a new revue, and the Reps brought out Anna Quayle to repeat her West End and Broadway co-starring role in the unusual musical, *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off*. Israel's Albert Ninio returned to direct, and Michael McGovern won a best actor award for displaying his considerable talent and versatility as 'Littlechap', the role originally played by the show's author, Anthony Newley. Originally scheduled for a five-week run, *Stop the World* enjoyed a fourteen-week season, with the public echoing the enthusiasm of Bill Brewer's review in the *Sunday Times*, headlined 'Stop the Queues, I Want to Get In!'.

Hymie Udwin's Theatre International presented Jose Greco and his Spanish Dance Company at the Civic, and I was asked to handle the publicity for this. Happily, it was a success. Musica Viva brought the Beaux Arts Trio during this period, and Nicanor Zabaleta, considered the world's greatest harpist. His concerts were a rare experience. Violinist Edith Peineman came for the Johannesburg Musical Society, Sir Malcolm Sargent returned to guest
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conduct the SABC Symphony Orchestra, and PACT Opera presented Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* with Emma Renzi, Redento Comacchio and Ge Korsten, directed by Covent Garden’s Peter Ebert.

PACT was also responsible for the ballet programmes with Gary Burne and Phyllis Spira heading the company, plus a production of *Swan Lake* for which they brought the entrancing Russian ballerina Galina Samsova to dance Odette/Odile. Modern dance also got a look in, and the oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* was given at the City Hall.

Children’s Theatre took to the open air again with Robert Langford’s production of *Treasure Island* at the Zo Lake, admission from one rand to forty cents! It is interesting to note that prices had risen only slightly in the ten years since the founding of Show Service. Best seats for opera and ballet were R3,15 and the cheapest seventy-five cents, while drama ranged from a top of R2,50 to a bottom of forty cents. These days it can cost R20 to see a movie.

Racial discrimination played its part in pricing, too: the ridiculously low prices for the oratorio- seventy-five cents down to thirty-five cents, were even lower (fifty to twenty-five cents) for black performances. Indeed, without a trace of embarrassment, the papers sketched out the Festival programme for blacks, which included special performances of *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off*, and a parade of floats and two firework displays to be staged in the townships of Coronationville and Soweto.

One way and another, it was not much of an arts
festival. Indeed, the *Sunday Express*, headlining a piece 'Is The Festival A Fiasco?', voiced the general disaffection.

Publicity for the opening fireworks had been so alarmist in its predictions that the expected crowd of 100 000 couldn't be accommodated, that only 8 000 people turned up to occupy accommodation for 45 000! Overall, the period of supposed jollity was far too long, beginning in late August and continuing until 10 October, and the promised illuminations were not switched on until the end of the first week, which was something of an anti-climax. The general lack of enthusiasm was summed up by an unimpressed taxi driver who told journalist Molly Reinhardt, 'Lady- I hear they got ballet and opera and fireworks and millions of lights. They got too many lights in this town already and every damn one is red!'

The whole thinking behind this so-called Festival was misguided. To quote its executive director, Mr RJ. Opperman, 'Although the Festival coincides with Johannesburg's 78th birthday, we are not actually celebrating that event.' So, what was the occasion? To quote further, 'A group of prominent businessmen backed by the Transvaal and O.F.S. Chamber of Mines, the Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the Johannesburg City Council thought it would be a good idea for a city the size of Johannesburg to stage a festival which might become an annual or biennial event.'

Well, it didn't, of course, and the whole enterprise just went to prove that the performing arts need to be in the
hands of professionals, and that fine sentiments need the backing of large financial resources.

Meanwhile, either side of this event, there was much to keep me and Show Service busy.
A highlight of the musical year in 1964 was the March visit of Arthur Fiedler of the famous Boston 'Pops' Orchestra who came to conduct the SABC Symphony - as did Malcolm Sargent and Antal Dorati. Also, in March, the Johannesburg Musical Society presented British pianist Moura Lympany at the Civic, and later brought the Loewenguth Quartet while, in the course of the year, Tamas Vasary, Tibor Varga, Michel Bloch (recipient of the Arthur Rubinstein Award) and Julius Katchen returned for Musica Viva.

Amazingly, the annual subscription for Musica Viva at this time was a mere R8,40, for which sum members were offered preferential booking and could attend between twelve and fourteen concerts per year! In 1964, in addition to those already mentioned, Peta Fisher secured Portuguese pianist Sequeira Costa, the Vienna Symphony Woodwinds, the Chicago Festival Strings, and Henryk Szeryng. Violinist Szeryng was not only a great musician but a great intellect and a charming man. We got to know each other when we were both staying with the Fishers, and I subsequently heard him play several times overseas.

I made another friend in the Cuban-born pianist Jorge Bolet who came out for the JMS. During Jorge's visit, his
manager, Tex Compton, had a serious fall-out with JMS chairman Hans Adler, well-known as a difficult and unpleasant man, and when Jorge, who made many friends here, wanted to come again, Hans refused to negotiate with Tex. Jorge wrote to Peta Fisher offering to come for Musica Viva, but Peta felt it unethical to engage a JMS artist. It took six years to resolve the situation, at which time Tex asked me to organise a tour for Jorge, which the pianist would back from his own pocket. This was another first for me, and one which resulted in two more successful tours for Jorge.

Toerien-Rubin brought out the English comedians Dora Bryan and Alfred Marks, in April and July respectively. Also in April, PACT produced Hamlet at the Civic. Margaret Inglis - no stranger to the play - again directed, with Francois Swart in the title role, Reinet Maasdorp as Ophelia, and Joan Blake and Joe Stewardson as Gertrude and Claudius.

The still relatively new organisation also gave Johannesburg Anouilh's *Ring Round the Moon* directed by Ricky Arden, and William Douglas Home's West End comedy, *The Reluctant Peer*, directed by John Hayter. My biggest personal excitement in the first half of the year was the arrival from New York of my dear friend Elaine Perry, with a cast of five American actors, to direct the Broadway comedy hit *Never Too Late* at the Civic for Hymie Udwin's Theatre International. Leading lady Nancy Coleman and husband-and-wife Roland Winters and Helen Lewis refused
to fly such a long distance and arrived by cargo boat in Cape Town, where I met them at the docks. After a hectic day of sightseeing, we flew to Johannesburg in time for a lavish welcome party that Hymie Udwin had arranged for the company to meet the city’s theatre and socialite communities.

In the cast of *Never Too Late* was a good-looking young actor, novelist and aspiring playwright named James Kirkwood. He had recently published the best-selling novel *There Must Be a Pony*, and would go on to write the play, *P.S. Your Cat is Dead* and, most famously, to win a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award in 1976 for his co-authorship of *A Chorus Line*, which broke the record for the world's longest running musical (later outstripped by Cats.)

One of the several quaint ways in which theatre folk wish each other good luck is to say, 'break a leg'. At the dress rehearsal, James Kirkwood did just that, and had to play the opening night in pain and on crutches. The audience thought it was all part of the fun.

Taubie Kushlick had an active year with a revival of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, and *The Private Ear and The Public Eye*, a double bill by Peter Shaffer (later famous for *Equus* and *Amadeus*), at the Intimate; then, in October, *The Book of Job* at her much-despised Civic. This compilation of celebrated writings from the Bible was staged by visiting Americans Orlin Corey, his wife Irene, and their Everyman Players company. It was a stunning evening, highly stylised, combining elements of the Greek classical tradition with
the brilliant visual effects of richly patterned Byzantine art, and was very well received.

The Everyman Players also obliged with a performance of Arthur Fauquez's sophisticated, satirical adaptation of the legends of *Reynard the Fox*, which Taubie gave as a gala to raise funds for Children’s Theatre, celebrating their twenty-first birthday but in dire financial straits. The gala brought in a lot of revenue, but only enough to delay the organisation's eventual demise by a year or two.

By now Show Service was operating in more areas than I'd ever imagined possible. My primary object of servicing the performing arts had long been achieved, but for some while we had found ourselves involved with any number of non-theatrical events. I took it all in my stride - I was too busy to do anything else - but if anyone had told me at the outset that my office would be dealing with everything from soccer matches to fashion parades, not to mention furniture shows and later, in the Computicket era, domestic travel packages - I would have poohpoohed the whole idea. As it was, it was exciting and satisfying.

In September, we booked for the visit of Spain's Real Madrid, one of the world's top soccer teams, and I relished every minute of it, especially the match itself against a Johannesburg team called the 'Castle Knights'. In startling contrast, Show Service handled the bookings for the *Rand Daily Mail* Fashion Festivals, started in the late Fifties to boost the local fashion industry.

These shows, presented three times a year, were
masterminded and co-ordinated by Patricia Robinson, a
dynamic public relations personality. Sydney Baker, who
had returned from Europe to join the staff of the *Rand Daily
Mail* after working for such illustrious dress designers as
Norman Hartnell and Balenciaga, did much to promote the
Fashion Festivals by organising special feature coverage in
the newspaper. Every aspect of the fashion industry was
represented, and leading local couturiers designed eye-
catching creations for these occasions. In November 1964,
furrier Leslie Derber invited Pierre Balmain to open
Derber's new showroom in Eloff Street and show his
collection there. Balmain brought a string of glamorous
Parisian models with him, and advertising and publicity for
the event was handled by Anthony Farmer (whose
company International Advertising had the Derber
account) and Ruth Hooper.

On the night, the streets around Derber's new
showroom were cordoned off, giving unhindered access to
the invitees, and searchlights criss-crossed the sky in the
vicinity of the building. The hype was huge, and after this
grand private opening, Balmain's fashion parade went to
the Civic for a week. Tickets cost R10, far more than the
price of a visit to a play or opera, but the shows were
packed.

I met Balmain, and his right-hand man Erik
Mortenssen, at the private show, and subsequently
entertained them. Pierre gave me his phone number and
invited me to call on my next trip to Paris. The following
year I was in Paris, coinciding by chance with the *Prêt-à-Porter* season, attended by an army of international fashion journalists and the world's richest women. I called Pierre, who invited me to the opening of his new collection the following evening.

That day I lunched with some ex-South Africans living in France who could talk of nothing but the Balmain show, impressing upon me the social importance of the event and how well-connected they were. I said not a word, but enjoyed the looks on their faces that night when I turned up and was ushered past them to the front row.

At home, the long-running comedy *Mary, Mary* at the Brooke Theatre had moved aside to make room for the well-known British comedian Vic Oliver to appear in a play called *Distinguished Gathering*. I was not free on opening night and went to the six o'clock performance on Saturday, 15 August, the final night of the run. When interval came, an announcement over the tannoy requested all members of the audience who had gone out to return to their seats immediately, and company manager Jack Payne stepped out to appeal for a doctor. Somebody came forward (somebody always does) and disappeared with Payne, while we sat staring at the curtain waiting for something to happen.

Eventually, an obviously upset Jack Payne reappeared to announce that Vic Oliver had been found on the floor of his dressing room after the first act, and had now been pronounced dead of a coronary thrombosis. It was a sad
end to the life and career of a much-loved star.

Music of every sort was much in evidence throughout the year. Indeed, it had become obvious that this was a regular pattern in the cultural life of the city, and would continue to be so. On the classical front, amidst a whirl of publicity, Alex Cherniavsky presented a piano recital by twelve-year-old local child prodigy Marion Friedman who had made her debut the previous year, playing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra. The queues went round the block, as they do everywhere in the world for juvenile concert performers. Unfortunately, few of them turn out like Yehudi Menuhin, whose career as one of the world's leading violinists continued into his dotage, and, although very gifted, Marion never achieved international success as an adult.

The piano duo of Rawicz and Landauer came to the Alexander for the Qui bells with a programme of Chopin, and on the less classical side, Peter Maxwell gave concerts in April and in August. Maxwell, who was to make innumerable visits to South Africa for a host of different managements, was basically a cabaret entertainer, a stylish pianist-singer with a vast repertoire of popular standards. He had the common touch and could gauge his audience's taste in an instant. He stayed- and played in all the leading hotels around the country for many years.

Vocalist Frank Ifield, famous for his perky, semi-yodelled version of 'I Remember You', toured for ACT, who billed him as 'The World Singing Sensation, Direct From
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The London Palladium'. This was a bit over the top, but the Australian crooner undoubtedly had a large following, and his failure to generate box office here was inexplicable.

The Quibell brothers brought the 'Forces' Sweetheart' Vera Lynn to the Civic Theatre, headlining a show appropriately titled 'We'll Meet Again', which, along with 'The White Cliffs of Dover' was Vera's best known, best-loved song. Thousands of people who had served in the forces or lived through the war turned out for the show, which evoked so many memories. Vera (later Dame Vera), gracious on stage and off, never lost the purity of her voice, or its distinctive 'sob'.

The show was a tremendous success, with the Civic jammed to the rafters with fans who gave her a ten-minute standing ovation before she had sung the first note. At the end of the advertised programme the audience, sobbing with joy and nostalgia, refused to let Vera go, and the encores went on until 2 a.m. when the exhausted band could no longer play. It was a magical occasion.

To their 'Festival' production of Il Trovatore, PACT added Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor with Mimi Coertse in the title role, directed by Victor Melleney, and Gounod's Faust with Frederick Dalberg and Dawie Couzyn for overseas guest director Peter Gorski. Dalberg, father of Cape Town soprano Evelyn Dalberg, enjoyed an international career, distinguishing himself as a Wagnerian bass at Bayreuth, Covent Garden and elsewhere in Europe. The Durban Municipal Orchestra was hired by PACT to
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play for these productions, an example of inter-provincial cooperation which happens all too seldom.

Towards the year's end, Anthony Farmer staged the Moulin Rouge show from Paris for ACT at the Empire, designing sets that would allow what was essentially a cabaret to appear to good advantage on the large stage. With that work complete, Tony began work as director and designer of Lehár's *The Merry Widow* for JODS. The show, which opened at the Civic in November, starred America's Robert Rounseville and Britain's Olga Gwynne in the roles immortalised on film by Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald.

Rounseville, who had enjoyed a first-class Broadway career, had also starred as Hoffman in the marvellous film version of *The Tales of Hoffman* and was Mr Snow in the Hollywood film of *Carousel*. He had a splendid voice but, alas, by the time he came here, it had passed its peak and he was no longer the dashing young tenor he believed himself to be. Olga Gwynne, a pleasing soprano, had appeared in musicals, opera and on British TV.

For Tony Farmer, sets and staging were of paramount importance it was no accident that Percy Baneshik later coined the term 'Farmerama', still used in theatre circles to indicate lavish spectacle. For *The Merry Widow*, Tony built fountains, moving gardens, luxurious interiors and a monumental revolving grand staircase. This last began a journey from the back of the stage, slowly rotating to reveal Olga descending the stairs as she sang. When it reached the
centre, she stepped off and crossed the stage, still singing. I was present at one performance where the staircase kept revolving, leaving Olga unable to step off. Round and round, it went, finally grinding to a halt with Olga facing the back wall of the stage. She was furious.

Olga Gwynne was soon joined in Johannesburg by her daughter, Anne Kettle, who had been cast as the ingenue lead in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, a show close to my heart and in which I had a direct involvement. Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics, Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart the book for the show, which had opened in 1962 on Broadway.

I saw it that year, starring the fat funny man Zero Mostel (co-star with Gene Wilder of the Mel Brooks film, *The Producers*). An unlikely farce inspired by the low comedies of Plautus (circa 200 B.C.) and set in ancient Rome, the show was a major hit, whose score included numbers such as 'Comedy Tonight', 'Everybody Ought to have a Maid' and the lilting 'Lovely'.

I adored every moment of this good-naturedly vulgar, highly original and madcap musical and felt that Johannesburg audiences would love it. I got on to Hymie Udwin about it, and the upshot was that, through Alien Whitehead again, Theatre International acquired the rights. Alien suggested British actor and director Christopher Hewett, resident in New York, as director. Christopher (later TV's Mr Belvedere) had shared the spotlight with Hermione Gingold in London's famous 'Sweet and Low'
revues, and his career included appearances in many Broadway shows from *My Fair Lady* to Peter Pan. Mannie Manim was employed by Hymie as production and company manager and Aubrey Louw was now general manager for Theatre International.

It was decided to bring a full American cast. Jack Harrold was cast in the Zero Mostel role of PseudoIus, the slave who serves the aptly named Hero (Joseph Corby), son of Senex and Domina (William Le Messena, Fran Stevens). Their slave (played by Emory Bass) is named Hysterium, and other characters are variously called Tintinabula, Panacea, Vibrata, Gymnasia and Erronius. The names say it all.

The company rehearsed here, with Christopher Hewett determined to produce a show of exceptionally high standards. In addition to dealing with booking - the show was to open at the Civic, with a tour of the other major cities to follow - I was appointed to handle publicity and public relations, and thus got to know Christopher well and attended several rehearsals. They were awesomely professional and energetic.

Then a funny thing happened on the way to a hit ... 

The opening night was a riot, and the reviews nothing short of sensational. Although the first three nights were wonderful, the advance booking was only fair, but I fully expected it to pick up. However, I had sold the first Saturday's second house to a charity, and it was this, I believe, that sounded the premature death knell for the
show. It was clear within ten minutes of the curtain rising that this audience was not plugging in to the crazy goings-on on the stage. The men were particularly unresponsive, and many dozed off in the course of the evening. Charity audiences, who pay over the odds, talk. And, clearly, this lot talked - to their friends, who talked to their friends, who talked to their hairdressers ... Our smash hit went down the drain, and the tour was cancelled.

To this day it remains one of the best musical productions Johannesburg has ever seen and I still look back on its failure with disappointment and a certain amount of incomprehension.

English singer Dusty Springfield of the Springfields had gone solo when the group split up, gaining popularity in 1963 with her hit single, 'I Only Want to be with You'. She arrived for a South African tour in December, but when she got here she refused to perform to segregated audiences. Admirable as her sentiments may have been, it was the first that South African impresario Dennis Wainer had heard of them. Not only was there no contractual agreement to this effect, but multi-racial audiences were not permitted in the halls he had booked.

Miss Springfield remained adamant. In desperation, the management invited some Chinese people to her opening performance at the Johannesburg City Hall and packed the front row with them. The singer seemed satisfied with this ludicrous and insulting arrangement, but
when she left on her tour, her personal manager gave a series of controversial press interviews in which the Prime Minister, Dr Verwoerd, was repeatedly criticised. By the time Dusty reached Cape Town, the government had had enough, and she was served with a deportation order.

Back in Johannesburg prior to catching a plane out, she held a press conference at the Waldorf Hotel where, to general astonishment, international TV newsmen had miraculously gathered. It was clearly a put-up job orchestrated by the singer’s manager.

The government reacted to Miss Springfield’s behaviour by banning multi-racial audiences at those few venues, such as Wits Great Hall and the Luxurama, where integrated gatherings had still been possible. This state of affairs continued for some fourteen years, entrenched by amendments to the Group Areas Act passed the following year.

It was a sour ending to the year which, on 12 June, had seen the end of the long-running Rivonia Trial and the sentencing to life imprisonment of Nelson Mandela.
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE
OUTLOOK THREATENING....

The Government Gazette of 12 February 1965 confirmed that, under the Group Areas Act, the admission of mixed audiences without a special permit would be judged a criminal offence. This brought increased opprobrium from overseas (particularly British) playwrights, who reaffirmed the ban on their work. As newspapers commented, the South African theatre was faced with the possibility of slow starvation for want of new material.

Brian Brooke announced that he could no longer carry on without fresh material, offered his theatre to PACT and to the Johannesburg Municipality and, in a dramatic gesture of despair, put it up for sale. Fortunately, he abandoned this course. The playwrights' ban was the biggest factor in the departure of Leonard Schach because 'I can't get the kind of plays I like to do'.

In February, Percy Baneshik in the Sunday Chronicle deplored 'the most dismal [weekend] ever recorded in the history of South African theatre. The Government's hardening of heart on the multi-racial issue,' wrote Mr Baneshik, 'sounded the knell of all influx of scripts (and their interpreters) of any significance from abroad.'

On 7 March, under the headline 'Theatre S.O.S. To
Government’, Margaret Smith wrote, 'The South African Theatre is facing a threatened crisis of closed theatres, bankrupt backers and unemployed players. The situation has caused the S.A. Association of Theatrical Managements to appeal to the Minister to see a deputation to discuss the serious effect of the latest apartheid measures, otherwise, one by one, the footlights will be dimmed and eventually extinguished.'

The astonishing response of the government to this critical state of affairs was an announcement from the Minister of Economic Affairs, Dr Diederichs (later State President), that plans were underway for a new Copyright Bill which would permit South African producers to side-step the ban by 'legally' pirating overseas plays!

In the midst of the gloom, Oliver Walker, writing in *The Star*; observed a cinema boom which, he suggested, was affecting live theatres which 'report depleted audiences in the teeth of this celluloid galaxy'.

But the situation was more complicated and, in practical terms, less immediately grave than feared. Individual artists whose contracts had been signed prior to the new Acts of Parliament honoured their South African commitments, and many more continued to ignore our politics in favour of their bank balances. Enough playwrights side-stepped the ban to keep the managements in business. But, in the longer term, the effects of artistic protest were slow and insidious, gradually cutting South Africans off from the main stream of cultural developments,
and leaving us stranded in the theatre of a fading past, diminishing our natural bonds with the British tradition and shrinking our horizons and, significantly, our standards of excellence.

Increasingly, South African audiences for light entertainment grew, while those for serious theatre declined. Eventually, a positive corollary was seen in the growth of our own indigenous theatre, markedly linked to political protest.

Meanwhile, on the surface, things carried on much as before

In January 1965, Taubie Kushlick produced *The Wizard of Oz* for Children's Theatre. It was the culmination of many years of effort to obtain the rights, not only to the play script but to the songs which had been composed for the immortal film version starring Judy Garland - the omission of 'Over the Rainbow' would have been unthinkable.

I had been much involved in chasing these rights during several visits to New York, and finally obtained them with, once again, the help of Frank Loesser. Taubie had a particular vision of the show as a folk tale and, accordingly, engaged popular folk-singing duo Des Lindberg and his wife-to-be, Dawn Silver- he to write extra music and lyrics, she as choreographer. Another leading folk singer, Keith Blundell, came aboard as musical director, and the decor and costumes were by Nina Campbell-Quine and Heather
MacDonald Rouse respectively.

The show, lavishly staged, opened at the University Great Hall on 8 January to rave reviews. However, two major problems surfaced. Because the venue was unavailable earlier, the show opened when the school holidays were virtually over, thereby losing much of its audience, and worsening the second problem which was financial. Production costs had soared since Children's Theatre’s last major show, while their prices remained low (R1.75 to 45 cents). Thus, *The Wizard of Oz*, which should have been a smash, incurred an enormous loss and signalled the demise of this invaluable organisation.

Their closure had been looming since 1962, when the board had called me in to advise. Pat Storrar in her book *Beginners Please*, kindly credits me with helping to stave off disaster for three or four more years. In July 1965, CT staged James Ambrose-Brown's *The Three Wishes* at the Library Theatre. It was their final production.

The end of Children's Theatre, formed in 1944, was another serious nail in the country's cultural coffin (they had branches in other cities such as Pretoria and East London). Their hundreds of voluntary workers and the press appealed to the City Council to save them, but to no avail. Dora Sowden in the *Rand Daily Mail* and Evelyn Levison in the *Sunday Express* wrote glowing tributes to CT's achievements, singling out stalwarts Mary Tilley, Phyllis Callie and Isabel Giddy in particular. Alas, the tributes were epitaphs.
The end of the organisation was, in my view, a major factor in the later decline of theatre audiences since, as is widely acknowledged, if you give children a taste for theatre, they will carry it into adulthood. Despite the fact that other organisations such as PACT, People’s Theatre, the Junction Avenue Theatre Company and the Johannesburg Youth Theatre came to fill the gap, the gap remained for several years.

Classical music continued to flourish, with Musica Viva and the Johannesburg Musical Society active as ever, and contributions from Alex Cherniavsky and PACT. Tibor Varga, Michel Bloch and Georges Themeli came on their by now regular tours, and among many other performers, music lovers welcomed South Africa’s own world-class soprano Joyce Barker, violinist Alfredo Campoli, the Endres String Quartet, Hungarian pianist Peter Frankl, the Quaretho Clasico de Madrid, another recital by Marion Friedman, and a return visit from the Vienna Boys' Choir, this time under the auspices of PACT.

PACT Opera staged Verdi’s *Nabucco* and Puccini's *La Boheme*, the latter directed by Peter Ebert with Hanlie Van Niekerk and Ge Korsten, and PACT Ballet’s programme for the year included the visit of Roland Petit to stage Carmen. Petit’s wife, Zizi Jeanmaire, appeared at the Empire and on tour as the star of a large-scale revue for ACT, who also presented British comedian Bruce Forsyth.

There was more ballet when Theatre International
brought the University of Cape Town company, led by Burne, Spira, David Poole and Veronica Paeper. The programme, given at the Aula in Pretoria and the Civic in Johannesburg, included a sumptuous production of *Romeo and Juliet* which sent the dance critics into ecstasies.

A highlight of the PACT theatre year was *Rashomon*, starring Patrick Mynhardt and directed by Joan Brickhill, which outstripped even the run of *The Miser*. Later in the year, with Louis Burke, Joan directed for the company again, reviving the hillbilly folk tale *Dark of the Moon*, with which Taubie had had a huge success in the Fifties on behalf of the University Players. With *Die Blinde Vegter*; actor Mynhardt turned director for TRUK, who also presented *Elektra* at the Civic, starring Anna Neethling-Pohl and directed by Costis Michaelides of the Athens Drama Company; and at the Intimate they had a great success with *Pa, Maak Vir My 'n Vlieër Pa*.

At the Alexander, however, the Reps were having a hard time. In an otherwise unmemorable season that included the musical *Pickwick*, a disastrous flop despite its guest star from London, Paul Whitsun-Jones, their only noteworthy production attracted attention of an unwelcome kind. Directed by Albert Ninio, Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (also known as *The Representative*) examines Pope Pius XII's widely perceived failure to speak out against the Holocaust during the war years.

Performed throughout the Western world, it aroused controversy and much debate. Here, it caused outrage
among the Jewish population (it was perhaps not the most tactful choice for a Jewish charity gala) and gave offence to the Roman Catholic community - in both cases, the reactions were perhaps understandable, but did the seriousness of the play an unwarranted disservice.

There was controversy of a different hue at the Brooke where Brian put on Frank Loesser's hit (1417 performances) Broadway musical, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. A witty satire on the Horatio Alger 'rags to riches' story, the show lampooned Ivy League college allegiances, big business, coffee-break rituals and office romances in its tale of J. Pierrepont Finch who is catapulted from window washer to chairman of the board. With a tuneful score and imaginative staging by choreographer Bob Fosse, the show had been an absolute delight.

When I saw the Johannesburg production, I was very disappointed. Somehow, Brian had missed the right tone, and the show lacked the high standards of performance and general slickness essential to its success. Oliver Walker's reaction was justifiably negative, but his review, headlined 'A Musical Full Of Tired Gags', indicated that he didn't know the piece, which he attacked with venom. He also laid into the performers without reserve, indulging in unnecessary personal attacks. This prompted Brian, who had previously complained to *The Star's* editor about the damage done by this school of unconstructive criticism, to ban Walker from his theatre and to issue a letter to patrons.
appealing for resistance to the 'crudity' of his opinions. Brian certainly had a fair case; it was only a pity that matters came to a head over a show that was clearly deficient.

Blame for another failure, indeed, a box-office disaster, rested squarely on my own shoulders. In New York, I had visited one of the legendary Jewish resorts in the Catskill Mountains. It was quite an experience. As one entered the Concord Hotel lobby, the Jewish mothers were sitting in a row, eyeing all passing males as possible prospects for their daughters. It was nerve-wracking running the gauntlet of their audible comments on one's eligibility, but I survived the journey to the dinner cabaret to hear Bobby Breen.

In his youth, Bobby Breen had an extraordinary boy soprano voice. He enjoyed a brief career as a child star, famous for a film called *Rainbow on the River* and his recording of the title song. As an adult, he still had a good voice and was very personable, and I got a bee in my bonnet about getting him to South Africa where, I felt sure, nostalgia would draw the crowds. I negotiated a proposed package with Bobby and had no difficulty getting Hymie Udwin to accept it for Theatre International. When booking opened, I knew that I had misjudged the situation. Few people, it seemed, wanted to hear Bobby, and of those who did turn up, many left after he'd sung 'Rainbow on the River'. Nostalgia had failed to sell, and the tour lost a lot of money.

Palladium top-liner Max Bygraves, whose style harked
back somewhat to the music-hall tradition, fared rather better. A keen golfer, he adored South Africa, and came several times after this first visit, always drawing full houses. Toerien-Rubin presented American stand-up comedian Allen Sherman, and the Quibells brought popular British singer Adam Faith. The pint-sized Cockney was desperately unhappy performing to segregated audiences in Johannesburg and, on arrival in Cape Town, decided he couldn't face any more. Leaving his musicians, his audiences and the management in the lurch, he flew back to London.

Des and Dawn Lindberg, swiftly establishing themselves as South Africa's own Sixties 'Flower Children' with their protest songs and poems about everything from racial injustice to the Vietnam war, presented their show *String Along Folk* at the Brooke Theatre, following Des' successful programme of songs and guitar-playing at the Criterion Hotel. Ironically, Des had begun his career as a blacked-up servant in a show called *Watermelons* in 1962.

A black company, Moloto-World, mounted *Shaka, King of the Zulus* at the Selborne and City Halls. The show drew a large township following who were, of course, segregated from white audiences. Ian Bernhardt presented Athol Fugard and Molly Seftel in Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye* at the Library. This continues to be one of Fugard's most oft-revived plays. Both Janet Suzman and Estelle Kohler have played the female role in London, the former opposite Ben (Gandhi) Kingsley, the latter with another South African,
Anthony Sher.

Alfred Herbert soldiered on with regular presentations of African jazz. He was a Runyonesque character, a bluff, kind-hearted guy who loved the races, and was always first in to Show Service to collect his money. Despite ongoing financial problems, which he tried unsuccessfully to solve at the racecourse where I occasionally accompanied him, he kept his musicians going, even managing to tour them to other African countries, getting them passports against the odds. His artists stuck by him, recognising that he provided them with the rare opportunity to perform professionally. They also regarded him with affection.

Theatre International brought the Eoan Opera group from Cape Town for a month-long season at the Civic under the directorship of Dr Joseph Manca. It was a real eye-opener for opera lovers and an inspiration to those conscious of the need to develop and promote black talent. During the impressive five-opera season at the Civic, audiences enjoyed *La Traviata, La Boheme, L'Elisir d'Amore, Carmen* and *Il Trovatore*. Founded by Mrs Helen Southern-Bolt in 1933 with a band of volunteers who taught in a small room in District Six, by 1965 the Eoan Group (deriving its name from the Greek *eos*, meaning dawn) had grown into a large multi-cultural organisation of some two thousand members and, under Manca's tutelage, the opera arm had developed to a high standard. The leading singers for the Johannesburg season were Joseph Gabriels and Sophia Andrews. Gabriels later did well in London, singing
Don Carlos at Covent Garden, but his promising international career collapsed under the weight of professional and domestic pressures.

In this year of shadows over the entertainment industry, two oddities attracted enthusiastic audiences. One was Cape Town hypnotist Max Collie. Max had a singular approach to business: place an ad in the paper, give away free tickets for the first couple of performances in exchange for poster display space, and rely on word of mouth to bring in the paying customers. It always did. Max never changed his promotional tactics or the contents of his show, and continued successful for many years, playing wherever and whenever he could find a venue. Previously unknown in the theatre, and not to remain in it, Gertie Awerbuch, with her then husband and Miriam Lopert, devised a riotous and unsophisticated show called *What Was, Was!* which she presented at the Jewish Guild with a cast of professionals including Charles Stodel, June Hern and Michael Fisher. A *pot-pourri* of songs and sketches, it poked affectionate fun at the ways of the Jewish community, who were crazy about it. Show Service was inundated with bookings, and my mother was besieged with calls from friends who thought she could use her influence with me to conjure up non-existent seats for the sold-out run. So popular was Gertie 's revue that she did another season at the Guild, and still another at the Alexander, that same year.

In the midst of all this excitement, I was appointed to
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the committee of judges for the first South African Record Industry (SARI) Awards. My enthusiasm was soon dampened by the numbing experience of spending several days in an airless little sound studio, listening to an endless stream of mediocre songs spread across nine categories from female vocal through Country and Western to Boere Orkes. It was difficult to keep awake for the gold among the dross and I never did it again.

Taubie Kushlick directed Auntie Mame at the Brooke. Adapted by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee from Patrick Dennis' hysterically funny, purportedly autobiographical book about a small boy raised by his outrageous Park Avenue aunt, the play later became the smash-hit musical Mame (book by Jerry Lawrence, music and lyrics by Hello Dolly!'s Jerry Herman), played originally on Broadway by Angela Lansbury and later, here, by our premier musical comedy star, Joan Brickhill.

Mame's dedication to enjoyment, expressed in her unforgettable declaration that 'Life is a banquet and most poor fools are starving', did little to inspire happy working relationships during Taubie's production. Adam Leslie was engaged to design the outré wardrobe, and Taubie approached Joan Blake, the ideal choice, to play the title role. Adam, however, was in one of his periodic states of enmity with Joan and refused point blank to work with her, so Shirley Hepburn, who had played Madame Du bonnet in The Boy Friend, had the unenviable task of substituting for
Joan. (Shirley's daughter, Moonyeen Lee, became one of South Africa's top theatrical agents).

After this unhappy start, Adam and Taubie were at loggerheads over the clothes which Taubie dismissed as 'bits of tat and funny old feathers'. The rows escalated, resurfacing years later at a party at my home when Adam, in a rage, lunged at Taubie with a carving knife. Only my intervention prevented disaster.

Having suffered an undeserved failure with *Little Mary Sunshine*, directed by Ricky Arden at the Alexander, JODS hit pay-dirt with one of the truly great Broadway musicals, Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls*. With its memorable gallery of characters, based on the writings of Damon Runyon, and a richly inventive score filled with show-stoppers that include 'Luck Be a Lady Tonight' and 'Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat', the show couldn't miss and didn't.

Anthony Farmer designed, and directed a cast that starred Diane Todd as Salvation Army lass Sarah Brown, Michael McGovern as Sky Masterson, Charles Stodel as gambler Nathan Detroit, Patricia Langford as Miss Adelaide - Nathan's fiancée of fourteen years standing who has a permanent cold - and Bradley Harris as Nicely Nicely Johnson. During rehearsals Patricia Langford, nursing a grievance, decamped to Durban swearing never to go on stage again, but she was brought back, calmed down and all was well. On opening night, Bob Adams in the pit pressed a button to bring the orchestra up to stage level. He got the wrong button, and he and his musicians continued to rise,
ending up just above the stage. Tony, sitting with me out front, turned purple with rage and prepared to rush round and scream at the stage manager, when the audience broke into loud applause, thinking this was a deliberate gimmick. Tony grinned, and the accidental 'gimmick' was retained throughout the run. It was used again ten years later for Tony's production of *The Great Waltz*.

Queues for *Guys and Dolls* stretched around the block, repeating the pattern of *Show Boat*, and I advised Pat Bray to do as we had with the latter and organise a return season. The Civic was duly booked for April 1966 and, once again, the show was a sell-out.

The process of storing and re-running a hit musical came about because we had no theatre which catered to open-ended runs as in London, New York and elsewhere. After this success, JODS purchased a disused cinema in Doornfontein, the Alhambra, to renovate and convert into a permanent home for their musicals.

Amateur companies, always a force in the growth of our theatre, were still very much alive in Johannesburg. They included the high-profile Reps Amateur Players Society (RAPS), affiliated to the Reps, University Players, the Ross-Munro Players, the Jewish Guild, and several others, notably the Bank Players. As their name implies, all the performers in the latter group worked in banks, and they had a massive and enthusiastic membership. When the Bank Players had a new production, generally at the Library Theatre, I had to open Show Service at seven in the
morning to cope with the exchange of hundreds of members' vouchers.

My own amateur society, the East Rand Theatre Club, celebrated its twenty-first birthday in 1965. Years earlier, Ethel and Zelma London had extracted a promise from Leonard Schach that he would direct the play to mark this milestone. Leonard honoured the obligation, choosing Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. In July 1996, I attended the opening night at the Market Theatre of an Africanisation of this play, adapted (with Gcina Mhlophe) and directed by Janet Suzman, under the title *The Good Woman of Sharkville*.

The year had been filled with a variety of events as the profession soldiered on in an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty. On the positive side, however, 1965 will always be remembered as the year that Pieter Toerien, aged twenty-one, pulled off a coup that had eluded many a more experienced impresario, giving the country the opportunity to see one of the world's truly legendary entertainers at first hand.
‘Legendary, lovely Marlene.’ The words are Noël Coward's, and I find it difficult to describe the mesmerising presence and almost frighteningly consummate professionalism of Marlene Dietrich, Hollywood screen goddess-turned-cabaret-concert-artist.

After protracted negotiations during which Pieter Toerien's determination never flagged, the star was coaxed to South Africa by Toerien-Rubin in April 1965. Her arrival sent the town into a flat spin as journalists fought for interviews and the public fought for tickets. My close involvement with her season at the Civic brought an association which I will never forget. I never ceased to wonder at her artistry, her glamour, her charm and intellect, and, when she felt so inclined, her acid imperiousness.

Dietrich's arrival at Jan Smuts, if hardly the mass scrum which had greeted Jim Reeves, nevertheless brought a large crowd who fought for a glimpse of this famous woman. The sense of excitement was overwhelming. She agreed to give one press conference, making it clear that it would be her only public appearance outside of her performances.
I arrived at the Hyde Park Hotel, where she was staying, an hour before the four-thirty conference. The room designated for the occasion was crowded to the rafters and already looked like a beer garden in the midst of a carnival. Sixty per cent of the so-called journalists present had no connection whatsoever with the press, and it was a mystery how they had managed to elude the security and infiltrate the gathering. Hotel manager Saville Weinberg was in a frenzy as the drinks bill mounted and snacks prepared for accredited journalists, and the Mayor and Mayoress, Aleck and Leba Jaffe, were wolfed down by the uninvited.

The journalists were furious at finding themselves seated at communal tables and informed that Miss Dietrich would give no private interviews or exclusives. In short, it was a public free-for-all to which our press was unaccustomed. As the long wait for the star grew longer, hostility began to vie with expectation, and the air was thick with tension by the time Dietrich made her elegant Chanel-suited entrance- a full hour late. One journalist had the temerity to comment on her unpunctuality, to which she replied, 'Late? You're lucky I'm here at all ... all those forms and declarations at the airport.' She added, with superb timing and a wicked smile, 'Of course, I declared my heroin'.

After a welcoming speech from the Mayor, Dietrich called for questions from the 'gentlemen of the press'. So thrown were the latter by the unexpected nature of the interview, that total silence fell, to be broken after a minute
or so by Dora Sowden of the *Rand Daily Mail* who said she had twenty questions prepared. The first was 'How old are you?' 'How old are you?' countered the star. 'Forty-eight', replied Dora, dropping ten years without hesitation. 'Congratulations', said Dietrich. 'You carry your age well' and, to the chagrin of the other journalists, invited Dora to pull up a chair and ask the rest of her questions in private.

This brief exchange was made memorable by the looks, presence and personality of Marlene. Mysterious, seductive, a symbol of eternal glamour, she carried the aura of her own legend. She was, and is, an icon, not only to her own generation, but to those beyond. She was 'discovered' in her native Germany by film director Josef von Sternberg, who cast her as the femme fatale Lola-Lola in *The Blue Angel* in 1930. It was the first of the several temptresses she was to play after Von Sternberg took her to Hollywood, where they made six films together, beginning with *Morocco*, and encompassing such exotic gems as *Blonde Venus* and *The Scarlet Empress*.

She influenced a generation of women and entranced men everywhere, but the enigma of the off-screen personality remained intact. Details of her birth have always conflicted, her sole marriage didn’t last. Her own daughter has written a scurrilous biography, and a feature length documentary made by Maximilian Schell was reduced to tape recordings over stills and old footage when the star took umbrage at something and refused to appear.
Stories that, under the sheen, she was a *hausfrau* who delighted in scrubbing floors gained currency over the years, and were verified here by an admiring Molly Reinhardt's account of Marlene cleaning out her own dressing-room, emptying dustbins and ironing her fabulous gowns herself.

Molly begged me to get her in to watch Dietrich rehearse, an experience I was keen to have myself. My request was categorically refused, but Pieter Toerien, with some apprehension, colluded in our sneaking in to the theatre illicitly. I knew the Civic well and worked out that Molly and I could enter at the back, crawl on our knees behind a curtain, and slip unseen into a box, where we would sit on the floor! Molly was a tall, flamboyant woman, and the two of us, manoeuvring ourselves position like soldiers making for a foxhole, must have been a sight to behold.

What we beheld or, more accurately, heard, since we permitted ourselves only an occasional discreet peek over the balcony of the box, was worth ten times what we'd put ourselves through. For two hours we sat hypnotised in the dark, listening to Dietrich instructing the orchestra and her lighting technician, Joe Davis. The word 'perfectionist' took on a new dimension. Marlene demanded absolute perfection in every aspect of her show, and from herself. As she stood, silhouetted against only a working light, singing the haunting 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone' in that low, unique, almost tuneless voice familiar to the troops from
her 'Lili Marlene', Molly and I found ourselves in tears. There she stood - no props, no fabulous clothes or make-up or lighting - just Dietrich, a sphinx-like enchantress. It was a taste of things to come when the curtain went up on 24 April and for two weeks thereafter.

I attended every performance, savoured every night's thunderous applause. This incomparable artist was an arch-manipulator of audience emotions, commanding total attention. She had honed her act to such perfection that you could actually set your watch by it. Her superbly choreographed curtain call, in her white swansdown fur with its five-foot train, as famous as anything in the act itself, occurred at the same time every night to the nearest split-second. Thanks to my involvement with Pieter and Basil Rubin in all the arrangements, I found myself included in the 'inner circle' who dined with Marlene after the show every night at The Bistro in Jan Smuts Avenue. I thus got to know her as well as one could, and to see her in all her different moods. Her charm was overwhelming, and I would do anything to satisfy her every whim. She took advantage of this and, it must be admitted, some of her whims I could have done without.

One night at dinner, she had forgotten some detail or other about a London show. 'Percy', she said, 'phone Noël Coward. He will know the answer.' This was not a request but a command, issued at half-past eleven at night, with no details forthcoming as to where I might find Noël Coward. I remembered having read in a magazine that he regularly
dined at the Savoy in London, so I took a chance and phoned the Savoy restaurant. Not only was he there, but he came to the phone. Bursting with pride at my ingenuity, I handed the phone to Marlene who off-handedly said, 'Oh, I've remembered the answer. I don't need to speak to Noël'. She turned back to the table, where the party included another regular guest, Percy Baneshik, and left me with the embarrassment of ending the call.

Baneshik, who describes Marlene as 'nobody's fool', found her to have an alert, assertive mind, and they developed a close intellectual rapport. Like everyone else, he admired her immensely, but found she could be very arrogant. Ben, the African chauffeur assigned to ferry Marlene around, once said to me and Basil Rubin, 'Madam must be very powerful. She talks to everyone as if they are black'! I was too wedded to my rose-coloured glasses to know or care. That said, she asked me to arrange the delivery of several cases of champagne for the residents of a German old peoples' home. Champagne for breakfast, she asserted, was essential for combating the onset of old age. I sent her the account as asked, but she totally ignored it for evermore, leaving me to pay.

In 1994, at my farewell party in Cape Town, Basil Rubin presented me with a magnificent bottle of vintage champagne in memory of that special time we spent together. Basil has a great sense of humour. Attached to the champagne was a card reading, 'With thanks from Marlene'!
Dietrich’s tour was a monumental success, so much so that she returned exactly a year later. The repeat performance brought a repeat reaction-rave press, sold-out houses, drooling enthusiasm. Once again, I gladly exchanged sleep for late-night dinners at The Bistro. On one occasion, we were an unusually large party. No sooner were we seated, when Marlene counted the guests and discovered we were thirteen at the table. She refused to dine until the situation was remedied, a tall order at going on midnight. It fell to poor Aubrey Louw to fill a fourteenth chair. I woke him up and virtually ordered him to dress immediately and rush to the restaurant so that the star could have her dinner.

A feature of both Marlene's visits was the number of flowers she was sent by unknown admirers. Fortunes were spent at florist shops and the backstage of the Civic overflowed with bowls and bouquets. I never saw the recipient open the cards to see who they were from. It was clear that she had grown bored with years of floral tributes.

During her second tour, a couple of Wits students managed to get unnoticed through the stage door, whereupon they made for Marlene's dressing-room in an attempt to stage a kidnapping stunt in aid of University Rag. As reported in the press, after the first shock of their barging in, she took the whole thing in good part. In truth, she was appalled at this invasion of her privacy, particularly as she was clad only in a dressing-gown at the time, and she
insisted that Pieter implement some tight security measures.

After the 1966 tour, the SABC asked me to do a broadcast, talking about the 'real' Dietrich. Pieter agreed to this, and I duly recorded the programme, in which I talked about everything from the humiliation of the student prank to her obsession with cleanliness. I described at length the many wonderful evenings spent dining and talking about old Hollywood, and concluded by saying what a privilege and a pleasure it had been to have such an intimate relationship with the woman to whom Jean Cocteau wrote, 'Your beauty is its own poet, its own praise'; whom Kenneth Tynan described as 'The Venus in furs with black leather in her voice' and said 'London has never suffered at the hands of so compassionate a murderess'.

Feeling rather pleased with myself, I returned to the office only to receive an agitated phone call from my mother. How, she asked, could I broadcast to the whole town that I was sleeping with a woman almost old enough to be my grandmother! I had painstakingly to explain that, contrary to what she believed, that was not what was meant by the word 'intimate'.

It was a comical ending to perhaps the most magical and unreal association I was ever to have with an artist, and my closest brush with a level of charisma and fame that is given to few. I treasure the memories and the beautiful signed photographs which adorn my office walls and know that such an exotic creature will never come into my life.
again. She was unique, both on stage and off.

Marlene Dietrich, who turned her back on Germany with the advent of Hitler and was not forgiven for it, died, a bed-ridden recluse in her Paris apartment in 1992, aged ninety-one
Nineteen-Sixty-Six began conventionally enough with the Quibells' presentation at the Civic of Scottish entertainer Kenneth McKellar- a big man with a big voice, who topped a bill that included keyboard wizards Rawicz and Landauer - followed by the Gunther Kallman Choir. Both shows were very successful, the latter pulling in the substantial German immigrant community but, surprisingly, English singer Kathy Kirby, despite the popularity of her chart-topping hits, 'Secret Love' and 'Let Me Go, Lover', simply failed to attract an audience.

By contrast, Gladys Morgan, back for the third time with *Those Were the Days*, a kind of quasi-music hall, British seaside pier entertainment, was once again a huge success for Toerien and Rubin, playing this time at the Brooke Theatre where she would score yet again in 1968. As the year demonstrated, light entertainment presentations were escalating and their audiences increasing. This was unsurprising given the playwrights' boycott.

In the face of restrictions, PACT chose to extend its drama activities, utilising three theatres to do so. At the Intimate, Francois Swart directed an Afrikaans translation of *The Italian Straw Hat* and Ricky Arden *Die Man Met 'n Lyk om Sy Nek* by Bartho Smit and Wedekind’s *The Love*
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_Potion_. Also at this tiny theatre, a rather odd choice of venue for such a work, Victor Melleney directed an adaptation of _War and Peace_, while Peter Ebert, crossing over from opera, directed John Whiting's _The Devils_ at the Alexander. Over at the Brooke, Francois Swart tackled the Restoration comedy classic _The Beaux Stratagem_ and Truida Louw directed _Die Pluimsaad Waai Ver_ by N.P. Van Wyk Louw.

Among the local actors kept in steady employment by this full programme were Siegfried Mynhardt, John Whiteley, Ronald Wallace, Arthur Hall, Kerry Jordan, Maureen McAllister and Shirley Firth. Towards the end of the year Shirley Firth ventured into management for the first time, joining forces with actor-director Angus Neill. Calling themselves The Stage Company, they took a long lease on the Intimate, where their first production was a revival of Andre Roussin's comedy _The Little Hut_. The Stage Company only did three productions in two years, but Shirley held on to the lease. This later led to her association with Pieter Toerien.

At the Alexander, Roy Cooke had contracted English director James Gillhouley to come out for three plays. The first had been the ill-fated _Pickwick_ at the end of 1965, for which I had done the publicity, and whose run was curtailed, resulting in a huge financial loss. The Reps filled the unscheduled gap with a hasty revival of Ninio's production of _Twelve Angry Men_, after which Gillhouley directed _Trap For a Lonely Man_, starring Jenny Gratus (who
had met musical director Boris Cohen while appearing at this theatre in Brickhill-Burke's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and later married him) and Somerset Maugham's *The Constant Wife*. Both plays followed *Pickwick* into the red.

It was back to local director Ricky Arden for *Travelling Light* and *According to the Evidence*, the latter Ricky's last production before he left to take up a post at the University of San Diego. During the run a pregnant Diane Wilson, who was Mrs Gordon Mulholland in private life, was taken ill in the middle of a performance and miscarriage threatened— which is how Elaine Lee, cast in a small part, took over after the interval and established herself as a leading lady, later successfully pursuing her career in Australia.

At the Alexander romance blossomed again when Erica Rogers and Ian Hamilton met for the first time, playing husband and wife, in Frank Shelley's production of *The Anniversary*. They played married couples twice more— in *How's the World Treating You?* and the following year in *Forever April*— after which they made it legal.

Early in the year, Louis Burke's production of *The Beggar's Opera*, which had opened in Cape Town at the end of 1965, came to Johannesburg, starring David Holliday with Louis, Joan Brickhill, Maggie Soboil and Frank Lazarus. Maggie and Frank would soon team up as a revue partnership for which Frank wrote the material, and they performed successfully in Australia and on British TV. Both finally settled overseas, Maggie in the States and Frank in
London where, with Dick Vosburgh, he wrote (and appeared in) *A Day in Hollywood, A Night in the Ukraine*, which enjoyed a successful London run in 1979, and opened on Broadway in 1980 where it lasted eighteen months. The show collected nine Tony nominations and won two awards.

Theatre International, who now had South Africa's most sought-after stage director, Kevin Maybury, in tow, and actor-broadcaster Robert Lang as their manager, had brought *The Beggar's Opera* to Johannesburg. They followed this with the University of Cape Town Opera Company at the Civic who, under the baton of David Tidboald, performed *Turandot* with Joyce Barker and Ge Korsten, and *The Barber of Seville*, with Gregorio Fiasconaro, who also directed both productions, as Figaro. That year, too, Theatre International brought out Luisillo and his Spanish Dance Theatre.

Taubie Kushlick and Brian Brooke, long time friends and colleagues, staged their first joint production. Each had tried unsuccessfully to obtain rights to *Fiddler on the Roof*, but Taubie had got Arnold Perl's play, *Tevye and His Daughters*, adapted from Sholom Aleichem's Tevye stories which had formed the basis for *Fiddler*.

Alec Bell, who had taken over the lead from David Kossoff in *The World of Shalom Aleichem* ten years earlier, played Tevye for Brian and Taubie, Sadie Festenstein Tevye's wife, Golde, and Mavourneen Bryceland, daughter of actress Yvonne, was Hodel, one of Tevye's daughters. A
minor role was taken by Lucille Gillwald, who would later play a major role in the operation of the Market Theatre. The Brooke-Kushlick collaboration proceeded smoothly, and they combined again to revive one of Taubie's earlier successes, *Listen to the Wind*.

As usual, Show Service was involved in booking for the whole spectrum of entertainment, which this year included a season given by a Yiddish Drama company from Israel, concerts by Keith Blundell and the Balladeers, lots from Des and Dawn, steadily climbing the ladder to popular success, and an elaborate Furniture Show at the Civic. I myself seemed to be running in many directions at once, involved not only in the bread-and-butter aspects of my business, but active in publicity, some rather unusual travels, and, increasingly, sport.

In 1966 tennis exploded as a spectator sport when Owen Williams was brought on board to restructure the South African Lawn Tennis Championships. His outstanding flair, together with his administrative gifts, transformed this tournament, sponsored by Castle Breweries to the tune of £10 000, into one of the top half-dozen in the world, becoming for some years the second most heavily attended event in the tennis calendar after Wimbledon.

Wimbledon referee Mike Gibson was brought out to officiate in this first major year, while the public relations, expertly handled by Owen’s then wife Jennifer and Adele
Lucas, made the tournament into a fashionable social as well as sporting event. The female members of the social set fell over themselves to attend Ladies' Day and participate in the contest for the best-dressed woman. Thanks to Jenifer and Adele's efforts (which were to escalate annually), famous visitors to the first Ladies' Day included Gina Lollobrigida, Emilia Pucci and Princess Ira von Furstenburg. Later, boxes were built for VIPs, and the PR team introduced corporate hospitality marquees with singular success.

Show Service manned box offices at Ellis Park where, by quarterfinals day on the Easter weekend, the daily queues stretched for a couple of miles. We worked almost round the clock, but the compensations for me personally were well worth the exhaustion. When I wasn't supervising the box office, I was able to see a good deal of the play and, a special thrill, meet and chat to the players who, like me, were constantly in and out of Owen’s office. Most notably, I got to know Billie Jean King (who won the 1966 singles), Rod Laver, Jimmy Connors, Chris Evert, Evonne Goolangong and Margaret Court. Billie Jean was always interested to know what was on in the town, and would phone me or call in at Show Service during all her visits here.

Sales were, of course, done at the grounds on the day of the match, since the players were only announced in the morning or on the night before. The bigger the names involved, the bigger the demand for tickets, and certain
sports fans were as idiotic as certain theatregoers. The tennis equivalent of opera or theatre's 'are the seats facing the screen?' was the oft-asked, 'Who's playing in the final?'. When we patiently explained that nobody could know that until the semi-finals were completed, we were sometimes accused of being unhelpful!

To the excitement of the tennis, we added another sporting 'first' to our books with golf which, in purely ticket-selling terms, proved to be a completely different exercise from anything else, since there is almost no limit to the number of admissions. We kicked off in grand style. The money poured in for a challenge match between two of the world's foremost golfers, our own Gary Player and the USA's Jack Nicklaus who came to be regarded as possibly the finest player of our time.

The return visit of my 'intimate' friend Marlene Dietrich at the Civic, followed by the successful re-run of *Guys and Dolls*, were the climax of this satisfying sporting activity. Then my father's sister, who had emigrated to the States in 1912, died suddenly and alone in New York, and my father asked me to go over and take care of the formalities. The first four months of the year had been hectic, and I was glad to get away, albeit for a sad reason. In the event, the trip turned out to be more hectic than anything Johannesburg could throw at me or my office and, though a seasoned traveller by then, I'm not sure how I survived the series of mad journeys I ended up making once business was concluded.
Leonard Schach had been invited to Greece to make a film called *Cry in the Wind* starring Flora Robson, and persuaded me to visit him on the island of Skyros, site of the film location, on my way back home. I left New York weighed down with several book purchases, only to find a letter from Leonard waiting for me in Athens requesting me to bring him a number of items, not least of which was a large sack of oranges.

I had arrived in Athens on a public holiday and without a clue how to proceed to Skyros. A hotel travel agent told me to take a bus to Kimi where I could board a ferry for the island. At the terminus, collapsing under the weight of my luggage and the sack of oranges, I tried to establish which bus to catch. It was a hopeless task. Seeing no alternative, I hailed a taxi and asked the driver to take me to Kimi. He threw my gear into the car and sped off, chattering animatedly about a picnic in his smattering of broken English. He drove at breakneck speed over often rutted roads, but he seemed friendly enough and, in my by now thoroughly bamboozled state, I abandoned myself to fate.

Fate had obviously decided that I needed a first-hand encounter with the Greek peasantry. Next thing I knew, we drove into a small village amidst much hooting from my driver, and enthusiastic waves from old men sitting outside dusty street cafes. Yanni, for that was his name, stopped at a farmhouse and bundled me indoors to meet his wife and two small children. In a matter of moments, the wife loaded
a food basket into the car while Yanni untethered a goat from the gatepost, and loaded that into the car, too. Goat and basket were joined by wife and children and, finally, me. Away we all went, stopping after an hour in the middle of nowhere, where the basket was unloaded, and we all shared an extremely merry picnic, communicating with a lot of gestures and shrieks of laughter.

After lunch the family took a nap in the sun, leaving me to communicate silently with the goat. Finally, we arrived at the tiny port of Kimi. Yanni’s wife kissed me, I kissed the children, the family departed noisily, and I sank onto the nearest bench, gazing helplessly at a boat-free sea. It was then that I realised that the taxi fare Yanni had quoted would have bought a one-way ticket back to New York, but I wouldn’t have missed that insane escapade for anything.

I spent the thankfully balmy night waiting for a ferry to materialise. This happened in the small hours of the morning, and I finally reached my destination as dawn was breaking, having been in transit for forty-eight hours. The ordeal wasn't over. The harbour at Skyros was deserted but for a little band of Greek Orthodox priests and a young lad with a donkey, which turned out to be the only available means of transport to the hotel where Leonard's film crew were staying. There was nothing for it but to allow him to load my cases, the books, the bag of oranges and me- who was bigger than the donkey- onto this poor beast.

Leonard and company were out filming, and I found only Pamela Lewis, the designer. 'Hello, what are you doing
here? she said. 'I've come from New York to deliver fresh oranges to the crew', I replied, rather pleased with my understated witticism. 'Oh, how nice,' said Pam, and disappeared. At long last Leonard appeared with Flora, who gave me a most affectionate welcome. All Leonard said was, 'Did you bring the oranges? 'I was left speechless!

I spent four relaxing days on this magical island, watched some of the filming, and visited the grave of the war poet Rupert Brooke. Back in Athens to get my flight home, I learnt that all the major European airlines were on strike. My only way out of there was to grab the offer of a seat on a small Canadian charter plane to Brussels. It seated twenty-four passengers, but somehow there were twenty-eight of us on board. At Brussels I rushed to the Sabena desk- no flights to South Africa. Why not, suggested the helpful Belgian, take our charter to Madrid tomorrow morning? Why not, indeed. By now, my travels which had begun as a brief, straightforward trip to New York, were taking on an extended and surreal life of their own ...

There was no overnight hotel accommodation available in Brussels, and I joined several other unfortunates on the airport floor. There, I met some Americans who had run out of money. I helped them out of their crisis, and we spent such a convivial evening camped out with our luggage that they came to South Africa to see me a couple of years later, and I once again hit the Kruger Park trail.

In Madrid, I decided to take up Jorge Bolet's invitation to visit him. He and Tex gave me a thorough tour of Madrid,
then we flew to their home at Fuenterrabia where Jorge's brother, the orchestral conductor Albert Bolet, was also visiting. What a great time we had - Liszt, Mozart, Rachmaninov and Schumann in the mornings, trips to delightful places new to me, such as San Sebastian, for lunch, afternoon siestas, and late-night dinners in a series of magnificent Spanish restaurants.

I finally got back to Johannesburg, bursting with a kaleidoscopic wealth of new and varied experiences, for which I had Leonard's need for a bag of oranges to thank!

Eventually I saw Cry in the Wind in London where producer Anthony Helier asked me to help organise a South African release. My years on the committee of the Johannesburg Film Society, along with Hymie Groer, Philip Miller, Philip Altbeker (later film critic for Business Day), Julius Butkow and others, had clearly demonstrated that many people here were interested in foreign films, but my representations to Philo Pieterse Productions met with a refusal. It was not their policy, Pieterse said, to release subtitled films in Johannesburg. (The film was made in Greek, with Flora, who had learnt her lines phonetically to make a perfect sound-vision match, dubbed).

Back home once again, I could look forward to more tournament tennis. Meanwhile, Pieter Toerien had his first brush with the legitimate theatre when he and Basil Rubin presented James Ambrose-Brown's The Years of the Locust at the Alexander Theatre, which David Bloomberg had originally produced in Cape Town. With a cast that
included Johann Nell, Frank Shelley and Yvonne Bryceland, the play dealt with the relationship between a fictitious Archbishop of Cape Town and a revolutionary parishioner. Johannesburg audiences stayed away in droves, a syndrome with which Pieter was to grow all too familiar.

On the musical front, PACT provided five operas, among them *Nabucco* with Emma Renzi, Joyce Barker and Covent Garden's Norman Bailey, while visiting soloists for the two musical societies included pianists Alicia de la Rocha, Hans Richter-Haaser and South African Yonty Solomon, who had been performing successfully overseas. Gyorgy Pauk returned, the Berlin Philharmonic Octet came. The famous French baritone Gerard Souzay gave recitals, accompanied by Dalton Baldwin, and I once again took on the guise of a tour guide, escorting them here, there and everywhere.

ACT brought *The Seekers* to the Colosseum where they were enthusiastically received, and presented the Portuguese Ballet Company at the Empire. Popular broadcaster Mervyn Johns decided to have a crack at management and presented Lucero Tena, billed as 'The Queen of Flamenco', in a season at the Civic. Señora Tena went down a treat, but Mervyn didn't pursue the life of an impresario for long.

In June 1966, Senator Robert Kennedy and his wife Ethel had come to South Africa. In a whirlwind four-day tour, Kennedy addressed packed audiences at the
universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Natal and the Witwatersrand, met with Chief Albert Luthuli and other dignitaries opposed to apartheid, visited Soweto, and brought a fleeting message of hope to the politically and economically dispossessed.

Three months later, on 6 September, the Prime Minister Dr Hendrik Verwoerd was assassinated in the Houses of Parliament by a messenger of Greek descent named Dimitri Tsafendas. This followed a previous attempt on his life six years earlier at the Rand Easter Show. The country was shocked, but grief was confined to his disciples. He was succeeded by John Vorster, the hard-line former Minister of Justice, and any hopes that the regime would soften were soon dashed.

The entertainment world reacted to this dark event by staging a series of ever more frivolous diversions to see out the remainder of the year, starting with a rash of Minstrel Shows, the last of which was to run for thirteen months and delight three-quarters of a million people.
In September the increasingly prolific Adam Leslie presented *The Merry Minstrel Show* at the Intimate. It was none too successful, but that didn't deter Brian Brooke and John Kavan- who by a strange coincidence of ideas had planned their own minstrel show, from going ahead with it. Called simply *The Minstrel Show*, and co-directed by Brooke and Kavan with choreography by Frank Staff, it too missed the mark.

Meanwhile, Joan Brickhill and Louis Burke had also co-devised a minstrel show, to be presented by African Consolidated Theatres in October. Realising it would be the third in a row, Jim Stodel got cold feet and wanted to back out, but Joan was determined to press ahead with what had been conceived as the most ambitious of her ventures with Louis. She convinced Stodel that Brian and Adam's productions were not the real thing, that of the three theirs would be the biggest, the best, and the truest to the original- London's long-running Victoria Palace *Black and White Minstrel Show*.

Another hurdle to be overcome was the difficulty of finding a lead girl able to act, sing, and cope with the variety of dance steps Joan had devised. Eventually, she agreed to Louis' suggestion that she take the role herself, but Stodel
Percy Tucker

baulked at this. Once again, the Brickhill-Burke will prevailed.

On 24 October 1966, *Minstrel Scandals* opened at the Alhambra in Cape Town before coming to the Empire, Johannesburg. A lavish production, it met with spectacular success in all the main centres to which it toured before finally closing in November 1967. *The First Minstrel Scandals*—there were more to come—featured many talents to whom Joan and Louis remained loyal over the years. Boris Cohen was their regular musical director, and performers included Aubrey Ellis, Lynton Burns, Olive King, Michael Fisher, Stephanie Shiller, Beryl Ellis, Jeanette James, Ronnie Grainge and Charles Stodel. On this first occasion, Frank Lazarus did the vocal arrangements. And, contrary to Jim Stodel's gloomy prognostications, Joan was pronounced a star.

In 1966 Pat Bray, who for seven years had been my stalwart personal assistant at Show Service, decided that her work as secretary and business manager of JODS now required her full-time attention. Thus, it was that Aubrey Louw took over her position, bringing the expertise of a stage manager, stage director and company manager, variously acquired at the Durban Intimate Theatre, the University of Cape Town Ballet, with Leonard Schach in Cape Town, Brian Brooke in Johannesburg, and Theatre International (where he was the all-encompassing second-in-command to Hymie Udwin). Aubrey's combination of theatrical insight, technical know-how and administrative
skills proved an invaluable asset, and it was to my great advantage to have him well in place when Show Service metamorphosed into Computicket five years later.

During 1963, when Anthony Farmer and I were in New York at the same time, as we often were, we went out to Jones Beach to see a production of *Around the World in 80 Days*. This theatrical adaptation of Jules Verne's famous novel, in which urbane English gentleman Phileas Fogg and his manservant Passepartout travel the globe, was staged in the open-air on the beach, with the ocean as background, and was a breath-taking feat.

Tony was determined to stage the show at the Civic, but getting the rights proved a major obstacle. Eventually, with the help of Tom Arnold, who had co-produced shows for ACT for some years, and had staged a version of this one on ice in England, Pat Bray secured the rights for JODS, and Tony began work. Faced with a challenge of unprecedented magnitude, his imagination went into orbit to the extent that his first drawings required virtually rebuilding the Civic Theatre.

He came into my office one morning to show these plans to me, and to Pat, who nearly had a fit. Her anxiety was not stilled by the modified version. It was clear that the expense was going to be enormous, and JODS couldn't hope to recoup their costs in a three-week run. Michal Grobbelaar was able to give them an additional three weeks at the Civic, and rehearsals commenced with John Boulter as Phileas Fogg and Jack Tripp, imported from England, as
Tony Farmer dedicated himself to making *Around the World* . . . his most spectacular show ever. Pat had to brace herself daily for the next seemingly impossible scheme, and was beside herself when Tony announced that at one moment, while scene changes were taking place on stage, Fogg and Passepartout would traverse the auditorium ceiling in a balloon, over the heads of the audience. Since safety by-laws didn't permit this, the City Engineer was called in. Using all his persuasive charm, Tony talked the bemused engineer and the disbelieving JODS committee into agreeing, whereupon he designed an amazing track along which the balloon would travel around the auditorium.

As Malcolm Woolfson writes in his history of JODS, *And the Melody Lingers On*, 'Using every facility that the Civic offered, and creating a few more effects than the Civic ever realised could be done, Tony Farmer designed a show the likes of which Johannesburg theatregoers had never seen before. A show in which trains and ships traversed the stage, scenes of one country transformed into vistas of another ... and full-scale jungle animals lumbered from one side of the proscenium arch to the other.'

Even an ice-skating rink was built for one scene, and one could only be grateful that Tony didn't demand live jungle beasts. Indeed, Johannesburg had never seen anything like it, nor would they again, until the advent of Tony's productions at Sun City. However, as opening night
loomed, it was touch and go whether they would see it at all.

When the previous show moved out of the theatre, Tony's scenery began arriving by the truckload. Each day brought more until the scene docks were crammed to capacity. Still the trucks rolled in, up to and including the day of the opening, and scenery had to be stacked outside, exposed to the October rains. JODS didn't employ fully professional backstage staff, and it fell to Pat Bray's husband Ronnie, with a team of volunteers, to set the stage and organise the changes.

So complicated were Tony's designs that only he knew what should go where, or when - and he was busy rehearsing the actors. Ronnie struggled on, but could make little sense out of the mountain of flats and props, and it was clear to me that, with two days to go to the Gala Charity preview, Pat Bray was in a state of dangerous distress and feared the worst. Something had to be done. At Pat's behest, I commandeered a somewhat reluctant Aubrey Louw to come to the rescue.

Aubrey arrived at the Civic to find total confusion backstage. He had no idea what the show was all about (he hadn’t even read the script), but slowly, methodically and quietly (he can be alarmingly quiet!) he brought order to the chaos. He soon discovered that Tony had designed enough sets for three trips round the world and, in the event, several were never used. They remained out in the rain for the duration of the run, but were never missed.
Aubrey slept not at all, and ate only the occasional sandwich when anybody remembered to bring him one but, miraculously, the curtain went up on the first preview as scheduled.

I joined Tony in the lighting box, where he had to cue the operator since this enormous show hadn't even had the usual full run-through. Planned to run two-and-a-half hours, that first performance took nearly four, but the audience was thoroughly bewitched. In addition to the brilliant effects, Wendy de la Harpe's choreography was delightful, and Bob Adams coaxed a real 'Broadway' sound from his musicians in the orchestra pit.

It had cost JODS the best part of R100 000 to mount Around the World in 80 Days, but the show was 'Farmerama' carried to the nth degree. Word got round quickly, and every house was full. The sad footnote to the whole insane undertaking was that Anthony Farmer and Pat Bray, had a major set-to, and Tony didn't work for JODS again for eleven years.

December saw a continuation of escapist fare in the town. Pieter Toerien and Basil Rubin brought Pieter's favourite pianist, the American Peter Nero, to the Civic. A jazz pianist of considerable artistry and vibrant personality, the Juilliard-trained Nero was also known for his ingenious and polished transpositions of the classics, and was regarded as the foremost pianist in his field. It had taken Pieter three years of negotiation to get him here, and it
proved worth the wait.

Peter Nero was followed into the Civic by the Quibell brothers' Christmas offering, the vibrant Barry Sisters with British comedian Bob Monkhouse. They were well received but reviewers began to criticise the Quibell shows as being top-heavy with supporting acts. By the time the main attraction came on, they said, the audience had reached a point of exhaustion. The other Christmas show, for those who felt like seeing a play, was *Baby Talk*, a comedy at the Brooke Theatre.

On a personal note, I made a move from my 'home' at the Waldorf Hotel to the newly opened Rand International Hotel in Bree Street, to which Bill Reith and his wife, the managers of the Waldorf, had transferred. It was to prove my last transitory address and, while there, I met a number of interesting people. One of them was the reactionary right-wing Republican senator, Barry Goldwater, who'd stood against Lyndon Johnson for the presidency in 1964. Senator Goldwater, who was visiting as a guest of the government, had the suite next to mine, and was referred to me by the concierge when he wanted to know what theatre to see in Johannesburg. We had coffee together, and I soon realised why he had come to South Africa. He thought absolutely everything about the country was wonderful, and wasn't reticent in voicing his opinion ...

Also at the end of the year, Dora Sowden, for so long the music and film critic of the *Rand Daily Mail*, left to join her husband, Lewis, in Israel. At a mayoral function given in
her honour she said, 'Critics on the whole are not popular people. I have always tried, beyond the criticism of the shows I've covered, to foster popular understanding of the arts.' The departure of the Sowdens removed another cornerstone from the Johannesburg theatre scene, and the sight of Dora wearing her famous turban at openings was much missed by the old guard, of whom I was gradually but unavoidably becoming a member. She worked as the dance critic for the Jerusalem Post until 1996, and whenever I visited Israel I saw her, her turban still wonderfully in place.

South Africa, as I've said before, has always been a society of contradictions. Despite bans, boycotts and changing tastes, 1967 not only saw continued visits by overseas actors and entertainers, but the high-profile emergence of a new impresario and the opening of two new theatres. From early in the year, business flourished.

At the Alexander, the Reps kicked off with Forever April which should have been a great success. However, this appealing escapist comedy turned into farce of the wrong sort when actor Frank Shelley slipped in the shower after the final run-through and knocked himself out. He recovered in time for the opening night curtain an hour or two later, but gave a bizarre performance which sank the enterprise.

Fortunately, much-needed success came with the next production, Hostile Witness, whose large cast included a new arrival on the South African scene in Michael Atkinson. David Kossoff, plus his son Simon, returned for Seidman
and Son, in which Jenny Gratus co-starred, and this played to a hundred per cent capacity. For Hugh Goldie's production of A Day in the Life Of ... English actor Harry Towb and his wife Diana Hoddinott came out to co-star.

I handled the publicity for both these shows and, in the case of the latter, persuaded The Star to assign a photographer to spend a day with Harry, photographing 'A day in the life of ...' It must have been one of the most uneventful days in anybody's life, and I saw my brainwave going down the drain. However, on opening the paper the following Friday, I was knocked out to find three full pages of pictures of Harry, which made this non-existent story seem absolutely fascinating!

PACT's use of the Alexander also brought in much-needed revenue. Their production of Shaw's Heartbreak House, which Leonard Schach came back to direct with Joan Blake, Siegfried Mynhardt, Alec Bell, Elizabeth Meyer, Kerry Jordan, Francois Swart, Frank Lazarus and Maggie Soboil, moved Evelyn Levison in the Sunday Express to rave about 'A new peak for PACT ... undoubtedly the most satisfying and worthwhile production to have come from the English drama section.' Thanks to PACT's lease and the great box office for Seidman and Son, the Reps ended their financial year in the black.

In January, ACT brought Matt Monro, whose recording of 'Born Free' had been a massive hit worldwide, for a season at the Colosseum. It was a trying time for Jim Stodel and his colleagues since Matt turned out to be severely
addicted to the bottle. The Colosseum's manager, Henry Ascar (who later became the internal auditor at Computicket) was under strict instructions to keep all cupboards locked to prevent Matt having access to liquor. Taking similar measures out of working hours was more difficult, since Matt managed to persuade a waiter at his hotel to smuggle drinks up to his room.

On the first Sunday of the singer's visit, Jim Stodel had organised a dinner for the recording companies, the press and the ACT hierarchy at which Monro was to be the guest of honour. By the evening, the star was comatose in his room and didn't show up. A furious Stodel never forgave him.

There were no such problems with the world's most famous exporter of Gallic charm, and a gentleman to his fingertips, Maurice Chevalier. A major international star since 1930, the now silver-haired Chevalier was, at sixty-nine, as polished and jaunty as ever, and could still hold an audience spellbound for two hours, using nothing but his straw boater, cane and a piano to supplement his wit, his raconteur's skill and his expressive, gravelly voice.

Chevalier was brought out by Toerien and Rubin for a season at the Civic. His daily pleasure was to take a walk round the Zoo Lake with Pieter who, when he couldn't accompany the energetic French visitor, would call on me to deputise. This was an enormous pleasure for me. Maurice was not only a great artist, but a warm and interesting man who told me that, despite his decades of
experience, he was still very nervous before every show. He added, 'An artist must be afraid, because fear gives him a human emotion.' I arranged for him to be guest of honour at the twenty-first annual dinner of the Johannesburg Film Society, and his presence made this always important local film industry occasion very special. (Matt Monro was also invited as a guest of honour, but once again failed to appear.)

It was during this year of Chevalier's visit that Taubie Kushlick misguidedly staged *Gigi*. The shortcomings of the cast and production were not helped by the fact that this fragile piece was performed in the unsympathetic surroundings of the Zion Hall. The play was a ghastly failure, reflected in the practically non-existent box-office takings.

The Langford-Inglis Company, bravely soldiering on with often outmoded revivals, got the rights to Charles Dyer's *Staircase*, a rather bleak tragi-comedy about a middle-aged gay couple, in which Paul Scofield had starred for the Royal Shakespeare Company. With Robert Langford and Patrick Mynhardt as the two old queens, the play repeated its London success.

Ellis Park was again the scene of international tennis in March. This time, it was a high-profile fashion event, thanks to the presence of Teddy Tinling as guest of honour at Ladies Day. Tinling was the premier designer of ladies' tennis clothes, the Hardy Amies of the Centre Court, who, many years earlier, had been responsible for 'Gorgeous'
Gussie Moran revealing her lace panties beneath an unprecedentedly short tennis skirt, causing a furore of titillation and outrage.

This was the year of the first ever indoor Horse Show, held at Empire Hall, Milner Park. Show Service was asked not only to handle the bookings, but also public relations and publicity. Since show jumping was almost the only sport in which I didn't have an interest, and I was extremely busy, I wasn't too happy about taking this responsibility. Having recently worked with Jenifer Williams and Adele Lucas at the tennis, I hired them to promote the event, which is how their organisation, A and J Promotions, was launched. Also on the sporting agenda at Show Service was the Davis Cup Interzone Final, in which South Africa lost to Spain, and our first contract for Grand Prix motor racing.

In Durban, a company called Candlelight Theatre successfully presented plays in restaurants, starting an intermittent fad for Dinner Theatre. In 1967 Don Hughes, a new management, had a go with this at the Langham Hotel. For a total of R4.75 you could have dinner and watch a comedy called *You'll Come to Love Your Sperm Test* - not a title calculated to improve the appetite. At the Intimate Angus McNeill and Shirley Firth put on their second production, *The Creeper*, with Michael McCabe and John Hayter and, in May, Madame Carven brought her fashion collection from Paris and, like Balmain before her, was ecstatically received.

The theme of escapism, comedy and frivolity
continued at the Brooke where, despite the boycott, Brian had got the rights for two overseas successes, Terence Frisby's *There's a Girl in My Soup* from the West End, and Neil Simon's classic, *The Odd Couple*, from Broadway. The latter starred Anthony James and Brian Brooke in the roles later immortalised on screen by Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau, while John Hayter and Melody O'Brian starred, under Petrina Fry's direction, in the former. Author Frisby gave Brian the play on condition that the royalties were paid to Union Artists and other black causes.

JODS enjoyed another success at the Civic in March/April with *Kiss Me Kate*, Cole Porter's witty and imaginative musical based on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. The Civic was also the scene of PACT Ballet's main production for the year, one of Frank Staff's best works, *Raka*. This ensemble piece about African tribal life, based on the epic poem by N.P. Van Wyk Louw, was danced to music composed by Graham Newcater and boasted exceptional designs by Raymond Schoup. It was hailed as a milestone in indigenous ballet and was made into a film. Continuing the dance theme, Mercedes Molina also triumphed at the Civic with her ballet, *Festival in Zaragoza*.

My old friend Anna Russell returned in June on the first half of a bill presented by the Quibells with Horst Jankowski as the star attraction. Fans of the German pianist failed to understand Anna's brand of humour and this, coupled with the inadequate way in which she was presented, made her so miserable that she did an unannounced bunk back to
the USA. Once home, she wrote to me about her feelings and asked me to explain her behaviour to Ronnie Quibell. Also in June, Pieter and Basil brought Russ Conway back to the Civic.

On the bill with Russ were Jeremy Taylor, and the American crooner Dick Haymes who, in his heyday, had starred in many a Hollywood film musical and had numbered luscious screen goddess Rita Hayworth among his wives. He came to South Africa with his fourth wife, actress Fran Jeffries, and their three-year-old child. Though he was well-known as a drunk, a womaniser and a heel, it was sad to see a former star all washed up and relegated to a supporting act.

Among the visiting classical artists that year were pianists Tamas Vasary and Shura Cherkassky; the glamorous Israeli violinist Pnina Saltzman, who had first scored a success in South Africa while in her teens; Italy's I Musici chamber group; and the Crowson trio, headed by South African pianist (later Professor of Music at Cape Town University’s School of Music) Lamar Crowson, who had carved out a distinguished reputation overseas. A highlight of PACT's opera seasons was Macbeth with Joyce Barker and Renato Bruson, and PACT Music began a series of regular orchestral concerts under Edgar Cree, Anton Hartman and Leo Quayle. Over the years they would bring guest conductors, including Piero Gamba, whom I had known well when he came out as child prodigy Pierino Gamba for Musica Viva.
JUST THE TICKET!

Yango John formed a company called Phoenix Interworld in partnership with Hymie Udwin, whose Theatre International had gone out of business. Yango hired the country’s largest cinema, the Metro in Bree Street, to present Trini Lopez, which is how I first met one of the most colourful of all characters in the South African entertainment world.

Of Greek/Lebanese extraction, Yango John was a larger-than-life personality who had a very erratic career in various fields of endeavour, notably real estate. He was enormously expansive and generous, and made and lost fortunes several times over. (The losses were incurred in show business). Sadly, he died, destitute, in 1990.

Trini Lopez had been signed in 1964 to an exclusive contract with Frank Sinatra's record company, Reprise, and his first album, 'Trini Lopez at P J's' had captivated the music world with its distinctive Latin beat and the performer's *joie de vivre*, but it was his single, 'If I Had a Hammer' which sent him into orbit. The record had sold four-and-a-half million copies worldwide within six months, and, through Yango, South Africans were able to see Trini Lopez live at the height of his popularity- eighteen performances scheduled over ten days.

Yango, anticipating the huge demand for tickets, wanted a large venue. Thus, it was that he hired the almost three thousand-seater Metro, despite the fact that it had no stage, no dressing rooms, and none of the other facilities
necessary to a live show. Unperturbed by the problems or the vast cost of solving them, he pulled out a few rows of seats, had a stage built, and installed theatre lighting equipment.

Once the show was on, problems emerged with sight lines at the extreme sides and, more seriously, the front stalls and the back circle. Since the height of the stage had been determined by the position of the usual Metro screen, the performers simply disappeared from the view of the patrons in these seats.

Yango took it all in his stride, relishing the fruits of his own enterprising approach in the form of phenomenal queues and packed houses. It was an exhilarating season, and those involved were lavishly entertained by Yango and his wife Margo at a succession of delightfully relaxed after-show parties and Sunday lunches.

But the Metro venture was not to last. The next star scheduled for the venue was actress/ singer Lainie Kazan, who had built a TV and recording career in the States after understudying Barbra Streisand in *Funny Girl* and playing the part at several performances. Anthony Farmer was called in to solve the sight-line problem before Lainie's season, but the difficulty this time was the artist. After her opening, Lainie, who had arrived here direct from Australia, was found wandering around outside the Hyde Park Hotel in a deliriously feverish state. One report had it that her illness was the result of a scratch from a Koala bear; another that she contracted German Measles. Whatever the truth,
Yango stoically cancelled the rest of the season and Show Service had to refund all the ticket money.

By the time Trini Lopez returned the following year, Yango had learnt his lesson and negotiated the hire of the Colosseum (where he also presented Mexican bandleader Xavier Cugat and orchestra in a non-stop Latin-American revue). It was there, during Trini's repeat sell-out run, that Lou Botha, head usher at the Colosseum for thirty-eight years, found a crying baby in a crib, abandoned in the empty auditorium after the show. She rushed to Henry Ascar's office with the baby and said, 'Here’s tonight's lost property'. While pondering on what to do, they heard running footsteps in the passage and a breathless young woman burst into the office with her boyfriend, saying, 'I think I've forgotten something!'

Those were the good old days when the bus drivers phoned the Colosseum to find out what time the curtain came down so that they could reschedule their last buses to the suburbs for the benefit of carless members of the audience. In the midst of all the local activity, I abandoned Show Service to Aubrey Louw and took a holiday trip to Scandinavia. No sooner had I arrived than the Six-Day War broke out in Israel. Of course, we couldn’t know that it would all be over in six days, but as soon as it was, I cancelled the rest of my trip and left immediately for Tel Aviv. It was an extraordinary time to be in Israel. The whole country was in a state of euphoria that was difficult to resist, and people were flocking to Jerusalem to go to the
Western Wall to which I, too, journeyed by bus. I also visited Sharm-el-Sheik and the battlefields, went to the opening night of Leonard's production of *Hay Fever*, and saw *The House of Bernarda Alba* with Mandy Rice-Davies in the cast.

Mandy Rice-Davies was, of course, the girl who, together with Christine Keeler, had been involved in the Russian spy and prostitution scandal in Britain, which had destroyed the career of minister John Profumo and brought down Harold Macmillan's government. Subsequently, she married an Israeli and opened a club called Mandy's in Tel Aviv, where I met and talked with her.

In a radio interview on my return, I talked about the Six-Day War and my trip, and commented on the irony of Mandy Rice-Davies portraying a virgin in the Lorca play. This observation brought the wrath of the Jewish Board of Deputies and several Zionist organisations down on my head. How, they frothed, could I sully the miracle of the war by mentioning that prostitute in the same breath as Israel's heroic army!

What with the sparkling international line-up, the delicious irony of Jim Stodel having to hire the Civic for Marcel Marceau because no ACT theatres were available, my first Horse Show and the Israeli war, the first six months of the year had certainly had their fair share of excitement. Now it was back to the office to prepare for more visitors, and the opening of two new theatres.
Adam Leslie, who had been presenting shows almost continuously for a year or so, including the self-explanatory *Adam Leslie Repeats*, realised the fruits of his labours with the opening of his own theatre in End Street.

Originally built in 1906 as a College of Music for Johannesburg, the building had since then been a dancing academy, a boot factory and a macaroni factory before falling into disuse and neglect. Overcoming numerous bureaucratic obstacles and setbacks, Adam and his partner, Bill Hudson, persuaded the City Council that the building would make an ideal small theatre. Adam designed the interiors himself, furnishing the foyer and restaurant with antiques and period posters from his personal collection, a set of old pub doors, chandeliers from an original Randlord mansion, and the brass rail from the Standard Theatre for the gallery. Restored to its former Edwardian glory and atmosphere, the building became a virtual museum of early Johannesburg, further embellished by the ceilings on which art students had been commissioned to paint scenes of nymphs and satyrs at play.

During the chaos of rebuilding, Adam bumped into Anthony Farmer. The two had not spoken since a professional altercation some eighteen months earlier, but
the volatile Leslie broke the ice and invited Tony to come and view the work in progress. Adam, meanwhile, was locked in the silent aftermath of a terrible row with Joan Blake, for which each blamed the other, and neither would make the first move towards a reconciliation. Impressed with what he saw at the new theatre, and convinced that to open the venture without Joan would be a hideous mistake, Tony appointed himself peacemaker.

The happy result was that, on 27 August 1967, The Adam Leslie Theatre opened with a new show called *Music Hall Revue*, starring Adam and Joan, and designed and directed by Anthony Farmer. The public flocked to see this little gem of a theatre but, as tends to be the way of these things, nothing was quite ready on opening night.

I joined Anthony Farmer's party for dinner before the show in the theatre’s restaurant. A waiter took the orders, but no dinner was forthcoming. The delay became so great that Tony went to the kitchen, to find the electric chicken spit whizzing around out of control and the lady in charge taking a drunken nap on the floor. The extractor fans, it appeared, had been wrongly installed and were blowing a gale into the kitchen instead of sucking the air out. To add to the confusion, a bucket of chicken mayonnaise salad had been knocked to the floor and the staff were down on their hands and knees shovelling it back onto dishes, and decorating these with parsley to hide the blemishes. All this we learnt later. For the moment, a tense Tony returned to the table, telling his guests, 'Don't ask any questions. Just
have a roll and coffee’. We were bewildered but so, more seriously, was the backstage staff when it was discovered at the eleventh hour that nobody quite understood how to operate the lighting board. The cast, meanwhile, were having a bad time coping in their tiny dressing-room! Nonetheless, the curtain went up on the first of many successes.

Also in August, Toerien and Rubin brought Hollywood dancer-actress Cyd Charisse and her husband, crooner-actor Tony Martin, to the Civic. The tall, beautiful Charisse with her million-dollar legs, had her greatest screen successes partnered by Gene Kelly in *Singin’ in the Rain* and by Fred Astaire in *The Band Wagon* and *Silk Stockings*. Aside from a handful of acting roles, the creamy-voiced Tony had enjoyed a spectacular career as a headline performer and recording artist.

Tony Martin, basically sweet-natured, was a very insecure man who was wont to reach for the bottle. Now past the peak of his career and hungry for adulation, he also suffered from a tendency to repeat his encores *ad infinitum* to the point of embarrassment. He caused much anxiety, but, to the management's surprise and relief, stayed the course.

In October The Quibells presented the handsome Scandinavian entertainers Nina and Frederick, in real life the Baron and Baroness Van Pallandt. Loosely described as folk singers, they were much more than that. Superb instrumentalists, whose songs were witty and
sophisticated, they had shot to fame after appearing at the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, married in 1961 and had three children. They were accompanied on this tour by the golden-voiced Canadian singer Edmund Hockridge. Once again, it was Game Reserve time but while Edmund was fun, the Van Pallandts were rather dour. In due course, the couple divorced, and the glamorous blonde Nina married South African satirist Robert Kirby. That marriage didn’t last either.

November saw the opening of a second new theatre, The Academy, situated in a building at the corner of Wolmarans and Rissik Streets, appropriately called Happiness House. It was the latest venture for Hymie Udwin, and opened with a production of the American comedy *The Owl and the Pussycat*, starring Barbara Kinghorn and Christopher Galloway. Though it was a good play of its kind, benefiting from direction by Joan Brickhill and Louis Burke, audiences were disappointingly thin. Hymie changed tack and dedicated the theatre to the presentation of farce, renaming it the Academy Theatre of Laughter.

In December, the Academy presented One for the Pot by Ray Cooney and Tony Hilton, which had run at ace farceur Brian Rix’s Whitehall Theatre in London for three-and-a-half years. Hymie, joined in this enterprise by Yango John and Dave Levin, imported Colin Welland and Basil Lord to star, with Lord directing. Welland, a versatile actor and playwright later won a screenwriting Oscar for *Chariots*
of Fire. This production forged the first link with the Ray Cooney Organisation which would result in Cooney himself, after Brian Rix England's major producer, writer and actor of farce, coming to South Africa and contributing to several golden years of entertainment at this theatre.

For some time I had been struggling with a space problem at Show Service, where there was no leeway to expand queuing space for the ever-lengthening lines of customers. At the end of 1967, the next-door shop became available and I instantly leased the space where, for a time, we had a record bar of show sound tracks in conjunction with the recording companies. I also sub-let a portion of the new space to Sylvia Rich, who ran a C.O.D. ticket delivery service, thus taking away one of my major headaches.

The New Year saw the South African government's singular copyright laws put to the test. Despite Dr Diedrichs' brainchild, effectively permitting piracy, local managements believed that an author's right to his work was sacrosanct and had complied with the playwrights' ban, which had also severely affected the flow of new musicals.

However, JODS, whose business was musicals, felt victimised and, in January, their committee passed a resolution '... to make application in terms of Section 28 of Act 63/1965 to the Copyright Tribunal for licences to perform the musical plays Fiddler On the Roof, Man of La Mancha and West Side Story'. The announcement of their
intentions caused severe disquiet among the professional managements and led to an outcry from the press. The hearing for the JODS case, at which my friend Alien Whitehead, as executive vice-president for Music International would give evidence for the copyright holders, was set for the second half of the year. In the interim, the controversy rumbled on, with visiting Britishers, impresario Peter Bridge and actor Richard Todd, expressing their public disapproval of the JODS action.

Meanwhile, during a visit to the States the previous year, Taubie Kushlick had set her sights on obtaining the rights to *Fiddler on the Roof* a mega-hit on Broadway and, in between, had given a controversial interview to the *New York Times* in which she denounced what she called the 'dollar hypocrisy' - the withholding of rights to live shows for segregated audiences while allowing the rather more profitable showing of films under the same conditions. She endeavoured to set up a meeting with Broadway's most powerful producer/director of musicals, Hal Prince who held the rights to *Fiddler*, and to *Cabaret* which Taubie was also after, but all her efforts to talk to him failed.

During her stay in New York, Taubie was invited to join Senator and Mrs Jacob Javits for the Jewish Passover seder (traditional meal). Since she would have to fly back from out of town, where she was visiting relatives, in order to attend, she almost turned down the invitation. However, one doesn't dine with United States senators every day of the week, and she decided to make the effort. On the
appointed evening, dressed to kill as only she knew how (in matching white gown and coat, and bejewelled in her ice-blue and white 'tears’ as she called them), Taubie presented herself at the Javits apartment to find herself seated next to Hal Prince at dinner.

Being Taubie, it didn’t take her long to get him to agree to the meeting she had been seeking at which, with some prescience considering the developments at JODS a year later, she convinced him that it was far better to give her the rights than to allow them to be pirated by goodness knows who, and why didn’t he make the conscience-salving proviso that his royalties go to Union Artists and similar organisations. In due course, Hal Prince acceded to Taubie’s request, but was unable at the time to persuade the other interested parties such as director-choreographer Jerome Robbins to agree. Nonetheless, Hal and Taubie became firm friends and he visited her in Johannesburg, where I was privileged to spend a couple of uniquely fascinating evenings in their company.

Alien Whitehead arrived from New York in late August, minus his luggage which had gone missing. He borrowed some clothes from my friend and flatmate Graham Dickason and spent the weekend closeted with lawyers, after which the hearings were adjourned on a technicality. He was unable to extend his stay and left after a few days, which he spent in meetings with all the managements, to whom he expressed the view that, irrespective of the outcome of the JODS case, segregation and the right to
pirated productions were abhorrent to overseas writers and performers, and he felt sure that total boycott was inevitable.

The hearings eventually began in Pretoria on 16 September 1968, and lasted for several days. Both sides had hired big guns: Cecil Margo se represented JODS, and Sydney Kentridge SC the authors. The case was heard before Mr Justice Galgut, who delayed judgement until February 1969 when he ruled that JODS be granted a licence, but no exclusivity, to present the three musicals in question. As soon as judgement was delivered, JODS announced their plans to proceed with *Fiddler on the Roof*. Within days, African Consolidated Theatres announced that they had acquired the legal licence to produce that same show under Taubie Kushlick’s direction. The situation was ludicrous and JODS bowed out. Malcom Woolfson alleges in his book on JODS that Jim Stodel paid the organisation to abandon their plan.

While all these manoeuvrings were going on, Hymie Udwin broke the news that he had legitimately acquired permission to do *West Side Story*. This infuriated Jim Stodel, who had his eye on the show for ACT and had already asked me to use my influence with Alien Whitehead to get him the rights. JODS were now left with only *Man of La Mancha*.

The critics were unanimous in deploiring the JODS decision to go ahead with any show to which rights were not granted by the authors, but issued a statement in which
they were adamant that 'our attitude regarding the moral issue will in no way affect the individual judgements which will appear in our respective newspapers of the artistic and professional merits of the production'. I felt that JODS had blotted their copybook irredeemably and their days could well be numbered. Percy Baneshik, in a feature devoted to analysing the complexities, contradictions and ethics of cultural boycott, asked, 'Might the end of all this not be the twilight of the JODS?'

In the event, the show, directed and choreographed by Geoffrey Sutherland, did not open until 14 May 1971 when it collected unanimously enthusiastic reviews. Ironically, the public were less enthusiastic, and after all they had gone through in making their stand, JODS lost R26 000 on *Man of La Mancha*.

While all this offstage drama was going on, I was up to my eyes and ears in work, most particularly preparing for the arrival of my great namesake, Richard Tucker. Many discussions had taken place since our meeting at the old Metropolitan Opera in New York, to persuade him to come to South Africa. Now, as he was about to celebrate his twenty fifth anniversary with the Met and was considered by many experts to be the world’s leading tenor, he had agreed to visit Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, giving a total of eight recitals, and two full performances in PACT’s current production of *La Traviata*. His contract was with impresario Sol Liebgott; all the tour arrangements
were my responsibility and the Tucker season was sold out in advance.

Not only was Richard a superb interpretive artist possessed of an extraordinarily beautiful voice, at once silvery, shimmering and powerful, he was also a warm, caring, responsive and sweet-natured man. It was a personal joy to welcome him here with his wife Sara. They were a gregarious couple, and I organised a reception on their arrival at which they met the press and the musical public of Johannesburg as well as my parents and my brother and sister-in-law Mossie and Joyce.

I had arranged to collect the Tuckers for dinner an hour later, but when I knocked on the door of their suite at the Rand International a tubby, bald and toothless little man answered the door. I apologised for disturbing him - I obviously had the wrong room - whereupon he said, 'Percy, don't you recognise me?' It was indeed my idol, minus corset, teeth and toupee! He reassembled himself, and we had a delightful evening, followed by another on Friday night when he and Sara visited my parents' home in Benoni for the Sabbath dinner. Richard conducted the Friday night service and, with his artistry and love of Yiddishkeit, achieved in a couple of hours what I had failed to do in fourteen years: convince my father that I had not wasted my life in ticket-selling.

Richard's opening concert set the tone for the tour, with fulsome press raves and volubly appreciative audiences. For the rest of the season I put extra seats at the
back of the stage and in any other available corner where they could be squeezed to accommodate the crowds. After his Durban concert, which earned a prolonged standing ovation, my cousin Dr Alan Nestadt and his wife Rebecca gave a memorable party to which they invited the Natal musical cognoscenti.

Unable to leave the office again, I detailed Aubrey Louw to escort the Tuckers to Cape Town where Richard, at his own request, went to Groote Schuur Hospital to meet Dr Chris Barnard and his patient Dr Philip Blaiberg, the world's longest surviving heart transplant patient to that date. Richard sang for Dr Blaiberg at his bedside and gave him a selection of autographed records, a typically generous gesture.

Back in Johannesburg, he came with me and Graham to the opening night of PACT's *La Traviata*, with Gé Korsten singing Alfredo to Elizabeth Vaughan's Violetta. He watched only the first act and was walked through the set the next morning by Neels Hansen and Anthony Farmer. And that was his sole preparation to take over from Gé for two eagerly awaited gala performances, for which the highest opera prices ever charged in Johannesburg had been set: R10 top! (Richard's fee was $5 000, approximately R4 000 then - a special deal which I had put together with Dennis Reinecke, head of PACT Opera).

The performances, which marked the first (and last) time a Metropolitan Opera star tenor sang opposite a Covent Garden star soprano in Johannesburg, took place
on 28 and 30 August and passed into the annals of unforgettable Johannesburg occasions. The production was sung in English, but Richard only knew the role in Italian. When Miss Vaughan picked up on this, to the delight of the knowledgeable audience, she switched to Italian too, while the rest of the company continued in English. It mattered not a jot.

Though entranced with the evening, I couldn't help noticing that Richard's 'Alfredo' wig, a sort of bouffant affair designed to give him height, was truly dreadful. After the performance, I enquired as tactfully as I could why he chose it. He was truly astounded - nobody in all the years had commented. I suggested that his everyday toupee would look better, and, at the next performance, I saw that he had taken my advice.

The costs of the Tucker tour are instructive in looking at what has happened to the value of money since. Their suite at the Rand International cost R13,50 per night with an extra sixty cents per person for breakfast. Return airfares to Durban were R34,80 each. The Edward Hotel in Durban and the Mount Nelson in Cape Town were wildly expensive at R36 and R35 per night respectively, while the total bill for airfares for the Tuckers, flying first class, plus Richard's accompanist, was a little over R3 000. This covered New York to London to Johannesburg, all internal flights, and the return to New York, stopping in Rome. Three nights at the Kruger Park cost R31,68!

My friendship with the Tuckers was renewed frequently
in several places. We holidayed together in Israel, where Leonard Schach, who virtually ran a salon for celebrities in his magnificent Jaffa home, gave a luncheon for us to which he invited Pnina Saltzman, conductor Zubin Mehta and violinist Isaac Stern. We also visited Masada, where Richard never reached the top of the citadel because he was waylaid by busloads of American tourists for whom he happily signed autographs.

In New York in 1969 I took them to see Hair, which they loathed, especially when the cast tried to pull Richard on to the stage, and they took me to hear Joan Sutherland in La Sonnambula at the Met. Backstage afterwards, Richard introduced me to her as the man responsible for his South African tour. The diva, almost as tall as me, rose from her chair and, eyeball to eyeball, informed me that she would never set foot in that loathsome country. She did, however, condescend to sign my programme.

Richard Tucker died suddenly and too young (he was sixty-one) in 1975. I heard the news on the radio and immediately phoned Sara, who told me that the funeral service would be held on stage at the Metropolitan Opera House, a unique and historic event.

Another glittering star in the opera firmament graced the country in 1968. The Spanish soprano Victoria de los Angeles, on every musicologist’s Top Ten list, had been here in 1953 for ACT in the early days of her career, and returned now for Musica Viva to give a total of eight recitals,
appearing in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. The Barcelona-born diva, has been described by opera writer Rupert Christiansen thus: 'She is the most restful of singers ... Despite an important operatic career in the mainstream- she was particularly popular at the Met in the 1950s, it has been in the intimacy of the song recital that her most essential qualities were fulfilled.'

With Musica Viva strapped for funds, and Peta Fisher needing practical assistance, it was my privilege to handle the de los Angeles tour and pull out all the stops to make it a success. The soprano was the ultimate professional, tantrum-free and a joy to work with. Her accompanist was Geoffrey Parsons, the successor to Gerald Moore as the leading accompanist in the world to the top classical singers. Geoffrey and I became great friends until his death, and from him I learned the maxim, when in doubt ask the accompanist. No matter what the problem, he’s seen it all before. The tour (tickets R5 to R1) was a triumph, and I heard all eight recitals by a singer whom people all over the world would have killed to hear once.

It was quite a year for Musica Viva and its audiences. As well as Victoria de los Angeles, they brought the renowned French cellist Pierre Fournier (whose precious cello occupied a first-class seat in the plane's cabin, next to the maestro), and the great classical guitarist, Narcisco Yepes. And, for the JMS, another great soprano, Germany's Irmgard Seefried came, as did violinist Ruggiero Ricci.
Apart from these major events, it was business as usual. At the Alexander, the public stayed away from Monte Doyle's new thriller, *Dead Silence*, but James Goldman's *The Lion in Winter*, directed by Taubie Kushlick for PACT with Joe Stewardson and Marika Mann (formerly Marijke Haakman) was hugely successful. The cast had a wonderful present made for Taubie to commemorate the production: a handsome pewter casket engraved with the characters' names and mounted with their heraldic shields. After Taubie's death, her son Rupert and daughter-in-law Simone gave this to me in memory of our long friendship.

PACT's Afrikaans company presented a repertory season in May which included Uys Krige's *Die Ryk Weduwee*, and CJ. Langenhoven's brilliant satire on 'die Boere', *Die Laaste van die Takhare*.

For the Reps, Albert Ninio came again from Israel to direct the Feydeau farce *A Flea in Her Ear* at the Alexander, which starred Hal Orlandini, Shelagh Holliday, James White and Gordon Mulholland. I was the publicist and it was, thank heavens, a success, as was Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, a Reps-PACT collaboration directed by Leonard Schach. Marcel Pagnol's Fanny at the Alexander was another Reps failure, but marked the debut of Roy Cooke's daughter Vanessa, who would become one of the founder members of the Market Theatre Company. With more box-office failures than successes, and steadily falling membership, the executive committee of the Alexander had much to worry about.
Shortly, this building that had been born as a home for the Reps would serve a different function, reflecting the changing times.

Percy Baneshik had written the book and lyrics for a musical set in the 1880s and centred on the discovery of gold near Barberton in the Eastern Transvaal, where a thriving mining town known as Eureka City had sprung up. (The ruins of this town, which had its own opera house, town hall, post office and race course, can still be seen on a plateau above Barberton). Bertha Egnos composed the score, and *Eureka* opened at the Civic in March, designed and directed by Anthony Farmer and starring Lawrence Folley and, brought from England, Pat Lancaster. Despite the lively and authentic atmosphere, a parade of colourful mining town characters, and a couple of terrific production numbers, the show unfortunately failed to generate excitement or capture the public's fancy.

Lawrence Folley had been one of my school mates at Benoni High. The possessor of a splendid baritone voice, he made a substantial career with Sadler's Wells Opera in London but decided to settle back here with his family. On return, he had a rough time, with Leo Quayle, for reasons that I've never known, stonewalling his attempts to audition for PACT Opera. I used my influence with Leo, who auditioned the singer, but much time passed before he used him. Eventually, though, he became PACT's leading baritone, and went on to a lengthy and distinguished career with CAPAB.
Ballet was given its full due by PACT. Jack Carter's *The Witchboy*, had decor and costumes by Norman McDowell, who also danced the title role, as he did for London's Festival Ballet, opposite South African-born Diane Richards. PACT also paid tribute to Frank Staff's achievements by reviving several of his works, among *Raka, Transfigured Night* and *Five Faces of Eurydice*, which he produced himself. Frank also produced *Coppelia*, while Monaco-born Georges Golovine, PACT's newly appointed Ballet Master, produced *Giselle*.

It was a hectic year. If classical music lovers had had a feast of delights, audiences for pop music and light entertainment were far from neglected. Only the legitimate theatre, it seemed, was not delivering the goods- or, at least, not the goods the public wanted to see, thanks in large part to the playwrights' ban. This saddened me immensely, but didn't affect my business overall, and I was beginning to find the day-today pressures of organisation almost intolerable.
CHAPTER THIRTY
SEEKING SOLUTIONS

I had been running Show Service for fourteen years and I was still getting up at dawn, either to queue myself or to serve the queues that grew ever bigger as the horizons of my business expanded. I was proud of Show Service’s achievements, and took pleasure in my close involvement with the entertainment business. But, while my appetite for the milieu I had chosen hadn't lessened, it was becoming dulled by worsening levels of stress as I struggled to deal with the increasing pressures.

We had progressed to handling fifty per cent of African Consolidated Theatres' live-show bookings and had acquired fifty per cent of cinema bookings for Ster Films. We were not yet doing business with Kinekor, the largest cinema group which comprised ACT's cinemas, sold to 20th Century-Fox in 1955 and bought in 1969 by Sanlam. The insurance giant also owned Ster, but the holding company of both Ster and Kinekor was Satbel (Suid Afrikaanse Teater Beleggings). Forced by the government to operate separately, these two outfits were only allowed to merge with the advent of television in 1976.

During 1968 the venue for the symphony concert series was changed from the City Hall to the Civic Theatre. Subscription holders had to transfer their tickets at Show
Service - another major headache. For example, for the ten-concert series, we would have to pull out ten pairs of tickets from ten separate books while the customer waited. On the day the changeover booking opened, I arrived first thing in the morning to find that the queue already numbered some two hundred people. Since we knew most of the regular customers, we offered some consolation by way of personal apologies and endless cups of tea while they waited, but nothing could expedite the procedure.

This situation was echoed in the booking periods for Musica Viva, the Johannesburg Musical Society, the Bank Players and the Alexander Theatre - in short, any organisation which ran on membership subscription and involved preferential booking and the exchange of vouchers. Add to this the hysteria when we were selling for limited seasons by major overseas entertainers, one-off sporting events, fashion shows, and the periodic sell-out run, and life for me and my staff became an ongoing nightmare. There had to be a better way of doing things.

Early in 1968 David Bloomberg had sent me a magazine article discussing how the future of entertainment bookings lay in computers. I took little notice, since not only would such a system be prohibitively expensive, but seemed highly impractical in so comparatively small a market as South Africa. And besides, not even banks, building societies, or other financial institutions had yet gone on-line, selling services direct to the public. I put the article in a drawer and forgot about it.
Meanwhile, we had a more than full agenda for 1968. The Quibell brothers were at full entrepreneurial stretch. At the Civic they presented the popular trio The Sandpipers, whose first major hit had been 'Guantanamera'. These boys had an unusually flexible vocal range, all three being able to change from tenor to baritone to bass and back again, which resulted in a unique sound. Eddie Calvert, 'the man with the golden trumpet', and comedian Paul Andrews, were on the supporting bill. Both settled here, and Eddie died in Johannesburg in 1978.

American chart-topper Frankie Laine, whose many hits included 'That Lucky Old Sun' followed The Sandpipers at the Civic where the Quibells also gave us the romantic French singer-composer Gilbert Becaud, the dynamic multi-talented Buddy Greco, Israel's most popular female vocalist, the earthy, deep-throated Geula Gill, and South Africa's own Gé Korsten, who had an unusually large following for an operatic tenor. They brought back the Gunther Kallman Choir (accompanied by my favourite ventriloquist Señor Wences) and, at the Empire, they presented the electrifying Italian songstress Caterina Valente.

Pieter Toerien and Basil Rubin also had a high profile throughout the year, presenting plays, dance companies, and star performers. Ron Eliran, who had appeared with great success on the supporting bill with Peter Nero in 1966 and Roger Williams in 1967, gave a concert at the Alexander, and Pieter and Basil brought the Karmon Israeli
Dancers, who had appeared for ACT in 1961. Again, audiences poured in to enjoy their unusual brand of athletic folk ballet. I took Jonathan Karmon with me to synagogue one Saturday morning. His presence caused a major stir and had an immediate effect on ticket sales!

February brought Francoise Hardy on tour with huge success for Pieter and Basil. The former model and actress had become France's biggest selling female singer, with numbers such as 'All Over the World' and, all over the world, she set the fashion for a generation of young girls when she made a public appearance, dressed by Courrèges, in leather boots and a skirt whose hemline stopped way above her shapely knees - the mini-skirt, as it became known. Tall and willowy with grey-green eyes and long chestnut hair, Francoise was an undeniable beauty. At close quarters, however, it was clear that she had not yet made the acquaintance of the deodorant spray, though her fans were happily unaware of this deficiency in her toilette.

French pop music enthusiasts had a good year. African Theatres brought Francoise Hardy's male competition, the tall, blond heartthrob Johnny Halliday, who had sold fifteen million records in France alone. One night he grew a little over-enthusiastic on stage and fell into the orchestra pit, but his injuries weren't serious and only one sold-out house had to be cancelled.

ACT also presented Solomon King, an American giant-six-foot-eight- with a powerful voice to match his frame and a five-octave range. I loved walking next to the Big Man
with a Big Voice: he towered above me. He came via British agent Gordon Mills, who shaped the careers of Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck, and had steered Solomon to a huge hit with the recording of 'She Wears My Ring'.

But the biggest attraction from ACT, making three hits in a row, was the Liberace season at the Colosseum. Hazel Feldman had left the *Sunday Times* to become ACT's head of publicity, so I had an entree into the inner circle of the outrageous American pianist, who arrived with his manager Seymour Heller plus entourage and a million-dollar wardrobe. South African audiences, especially the women, who adored watching him flaunt his clothes, loved his extravagant personality and over-ripe piano technique, and there was never an empty seat.

With a Hollywood-film vision of Darkest Africa in mind, Liberace had equipped himself with essential items that he imagined might be in short supply. When he unpacked in his luxury suite at the Tollman Towers, with Hazel in attendance, he somewhat sheepishly revealed a bag full of toilet rolls. This flamboyant master of kitsch, whose grand piano on stage was decorated end-to-end with candelabra and who wore ostentatiously bejewelled outfits, considered his hotel suite to be too kitsch for comfort and covered the walls with sheets! Bea Tollman, who had designed the interiors, was horrified.

Toerien-Rubin ventured back into straight theatre with Aleksei Arbuzov's three-hander *The Promise*, which had been a huge success in London with Judi Dench (now
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Dame Judi), Ian McKellen and Ian McShane. Directed by Leonard at the Brooke, it was beautifully played by visiting English actors Andrew Ray, John Fraser and Olive MacFarlane. Also at the Brooke, Pieter and Basil unveiled Maggie and Frank (Soboil and Lazarus). This revue received excellent notices but did poor business.

Comedian Shelley Berman, whose imaginary telephone routine placed him in the front rank of American funnymen, came for a season, accompanied by a long-suffering assistant, Patricia Poster, and a personal valet. They were the first occupants of the penthouse suite at the President Hotel. Things got off to a bad start when, on arrival, Shelley started complaining bitterly about the heating and demanding air-conditioning. He grew more and more hysterical while the management sent in electric fans. Before they got hold of heating engineers, he erupted into a violent temper tantrum during which, to the horror of the management, he smashed some of the new furniture in his suite.

When he calmed down, Shelley confided to Basil (who described him as a difficult man with a fine mind) that he couldn't stand heat because it melted the gum that kept his toupee clamped permanently to his head. He also had the grace to send his apologies with a huge bouquet to the manageress.

At the City Hall The Byrds gave nine concerts for Hymie Udwin, compered by John Berks, then of L.M. Radio and a household name with Radio 702 since 1980. The Byrds, who
topped the charts with 'Mr Tambourine Man' in 1965, were the first Americans to supplant the Beatles' number one position, and had carved a unique niche in international rock 'n' roll music. Two of the group refused to play here because of apartheid and were replaced by two roadies who played with their backs to the audience. One of them was standing in for David Crosby, later of Crosby, Stills and Nash, who revealed this when he came here in 1996.

Show Service dealt with tickets for the Coca-Cola Pro Tennis tour at Ellis Park, featuring a group of players known as 'The Handsome Nine'- our own Cliff Drysdale and Ray Moore, Frenchman Pierre Barthes, Britain's Roger Taylor, Yugoslavian champion Nicki Pilic, Americans Marty Riessen, Butch Buchholz and Dennis Ralston, and two amiable, well-loved Australians, John Newcombe and Tony Roche. John had won Wimbledon and the US Open in 1967, and Tony had reached the 1968 Wimbledon final a couple of months before coming here. The total prize money at stake was R11 000.

The British Rugby team also came in the winter, and I was a happy spectator at the Fourth International at Ellis Park. Show Service again booked the Indoor Horse Show and, for the first time, handled Ice Skating Championships at Wembley.

Unfazed by their tarnished image in theatre and cultural circles, JODS mounted a production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* with three imported but
unknown leads. One of the most richly melodious of American musicals ('If I Loved You', 'June is Bustin' Out All Over', 'My Boy Bill' etc), the show opened in a mid-winter cold spell to tepid reviews. Audiences stayed at home and JODS lost a lot of money.

Rather more successful were the Salzburg Marionettes, presented by PACT at the Civic. These puppets 'perform' Mozart operas to a recorded soundtrack, making for a show of wide appeal. And the appeal of Adam Leslie to the Johannesburg public seemed to have increased with the establishment of his own theatre, where sole proprietorship gave him the advantage of that rarity, an open-ended run. His opening show, *The Music Hall Revue*, played for six months, and was followed by a new revue called *Strike it Rich* with Adam and Joan joined by George Korelin and Judy Layne. *Strike it Rich* played to enthusiastic houses for a year, with Marjorie Cordon replacing Joan during the run.

Our other new theatre, The Academy Theatre of Laughter, was also going well. Their July production, *Uproar in the House*, starred an actor from England named Rex Garner, together with Patricia Sanders, Gordon Mulholland, Hal Orlandini and Kenneth Baker, all of whom became stalwarts of this palace of British farce. Rex eventually settled here, turning to directing as well as acting, and his substantial contribution to comedy theatre has been enshrined by Pieter Toerien who named a theatre after him. As audiences soon came to learn - and love - putting Rex and Gordon on stage together was a perilous
situation - their corpsing became legendary. Next at the Academy came Ray Cooney's *Not Now, Darling* directed by the author, also co-starring with Rex. It was so rapturously received that it ran for forty weeks.

At the Intimate Theatre, the Neill/Firth company did their third and final production, a play called *Caste*, which Angus Neill (who was in it with Adrian Egan, Elaine Lee and Arthur Hall) somewhat oddly retitled *True Hearts Are More Than Coronets*. And in a garden restaurant opposite Joubert Park called Backstage, I worked for the first time with a new satirical writer named Robert Kirby on a show called *Finger Trouble*. Fresh from the SABC, Robert came to contribute substantially to local theatre over the next two decades, writing sixteen revues and eight plays. He remains a controversial figure, cocking a satirical snook at incompetence and corruption in his newspaper columns for *The Star* and the *Sunday Independent*.

The plethora of light entertainment which was becoming the hallmark of our daily cultural diet dictated the tone of a busy Christmas season. ACT in association with George and Alfred Black in London presented Michael Bentine, Joe Baker and Jane Fyffe in a comedy revue spectacle called *Let Yourself Go*. Michael Bentine was one of the founder members of the BBC's immortal 'Goon Show' with Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers and Harry Secombe, and Jane had played in *Wait a Minim!* in London. The show was choreographed by another successful
Englishman, Malcolm Goddard, a friend of Tony Farmer's whom I got to know well in his many subsequent working visits here.

A rather un-Christian note was struck during the festive season with a Gilbert and Sullivan spoof at the Library called *An Evening with Goldberg and Solomon*, full of Yiddish jokes; and at the Alexander, David Kossoff returned yet again, with British director David Scase, to star in *Big Night for Shylock* which went down very well.

The Scots singer and comedian Andy Stewart provided Christmas entertainment at the Civic, courtesy of the Quibell brothers, then left for Cape Town in time to open a season on 31 December- Hogmanay Night- at the Quibell's Three Arts Theatre. I had flown down to Cape Town earlier in the year for the opening of this theatre on a wet and windy Cape night. The evening had begun with Ronnie Quibell standing in the rain and mud personally directing the traffic in an attempt to ease the congestion.

I was not, however, present for the celebrations with Andy Stewart. I spent New Year's Eve on a flight to Brussels, where I was to connect with a flight to New York to look at a booking system called Computicket. In September, in the American entertainment trade paper *Variety*, I had seen an announcement that Computicket was about to make its operational debut in Los Angeles and would soon come to New York. The system was offering a choice of seven events, for which tickets could be purchased at eleven different store outlets in LA. This was a follow-up to the
article David had sent me months before, and I decided to think again. I cabled Alien Whitehead, who replied with the information that there were, in fact, three companies in the US - Computicket, Ticketron and Ticket Reservations Systems (TRS) - claiming to operate computerised bookings. He also told me that a Johannesburg company called Datamation had been enquiring into Computicket and that a firm with a South African connection had shown interest in Ticketron. Before I had digested this news, John King of South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN) invited me to a meeting to discuss a proposal by Communications Trust (Pty) Ltd about the feasibility of introducing Ticketron into South Africa. At the meeting I found that Communications Trust consisted of four equal shareholders - SAAN, Afrikaanse Pers Beperk, Andre Pieterse who was managing director of Ster Films, and an American company called Merklein and Associates. Representatives of Metro and Kinekor also attended, and Kinekor informed us that national cinema attendances were in the millions. This impressive statistic took me by surprise, and I realised that if all cinemas participated then computerised booking could be a viable proposition. I was the only one present with any in-depth knowledge about the live entertainment field.

Of the others present, only Graham English, general manager of Ster Films, and Barry Sinclair of Kinekor had the slightest idea of what the entertainment industry was about, and I felt very alien in this group of powerful
business moguls who queried the necessity to introduce computerisation. After all, they asserted, the public was quite happy with things as they stood. I suggested they visit the waiting lines at Show Service and see whether the customers would agree. I pointed out that our methods were outdated and caused endless problems, and that if we were to maintain, let alone expand, our audiences, then new marketing methods were essential.

I felt I was really alone in understanding the realities of the entertainment market, having been left very unhappy about the tone of the discussions and the unrealistic figures that were being bandied about. Nonetheless, Kinekor having recorded in the minutes their belief that adult films would never be permitted on TV when it came, since the government had to safeguard the morals not only of children, but of the Bantu(!), the meeting came to the conclusion that a computerised booking system would promote ticket sales, lower current costs and improve marketing controls.

I went away from the meeting in two minds. I was certain that the organisational benefits of computerisation would solve my ever-increasing problems, but I also knew that, relative to countries such as the USA, our potential market, was pitifully small. I also had little information about the systems themselves - their costs or how they worked.

Within days of this meeting, I got a call from David Abramson, who was planning the 1969 launch of National
Fund Investments, a massive new financial giant on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, which would control the management company of the giant National Growth Fund. David saw computers as part of his plan and thought Computicket might be of interest to him and that we might be able to do business together. This remained an exploratory conversation. Meanwhile, I had investigated Datamation. It was run by a team of former IBM executives, one of whom was Peter Campbell also who, it turned out, had been to inspect Computicket in the USA, where it belonged to the huge Computer Sciences stable. Campbell also had an association with David Abramson which had, presumably, led to David calling me.

There was no doubt about it - computerisation was in the air, and I stood to play a key role in whatever eventually transpired. I needed to see for myself whether the system really was a miracle and to study the costs and implications of installing it. That would necessitate a trip to the States at the first available opportunity, which is how I came to be on that plane on 31 December after an exhaustingly busy year.
My investigative trip was a revelation. In the course of various meetings and discussions, it became clear that none of the companies involved in setting up computerised booking systems had been able to solve the chicken-and-egg situation of acquiring sufficient tickets to sell in order to have the outlets from which to sell them. Effectively, and ironically in view of the South African problem of small markets, the United States was too big a country in which to centralise operations, and New York managements, theatre box-offices and ticket agencies were not tuned in to the idea of relinquishing control of their own sales.

By contrast, South Africa had limited venues, a contained market and my personal trump card - I had the tickets to sell. I was in a privileged and unique position to grow faster and more comprehensively than any of the American companies. Nobody had ever tried to market tickets the way other consumer goods are marketed - in stores.

I was convinced that to computerise my business would open up a pioneering opportunity to restructure the marketing of entertainment and sport. The idea of master seating plans housed in a central computer, with access from branch outlets situated all over South Africa gripped
my imagination. To give customers access to the service by way of their local shopping centres looked to be the solution to a host of problems. If I could institute the system, for the first time in history the box-office would go to the customer rather than the other way round ...

It was a big 'if'. I would have to find a system with a fool proof technical capacity suitably programmed to the requirements. I would have to convince all the South African theatre managements and cinema owners that the system was viable, and necessary to each of them. And, most important at this early stage, I would have to find like-minded and financially secure business partners to launch such an operation. This looked increasingly unlikely as I proceeded with my investigations.

My first port of call, to the offices of Ticketron, was a major disappointment. Staff detailed to demonstrate the operation had not the remotest idea how it functioned, and I came away no wiser than when I went in. My session with TRS proved equally fruitless, though for different reasons. Their programme gave the customer only fifty seconds in which to accept or reject a transaction - almost impossible since the seat numbers were not indicated - and, astonishingly, the tickets were printed out on a telex machine. I was also depressed by the fact that the operators had absolutely no box-office experience.

Third and last was Computicket. I arrived at a suite of plush offices, wall-to-wall not only with expensive pile carpeting, but an army of secretaries and a team of
executives each occupying lavish quarters. It looked promising, despite the fact that the company was not yet operational in New York. It then became evident that things were also slow in getting off the ground in Los Angeles and capital was eroding at an unbelievable rate while no income was being generated. No demonstration was possible since all attempts to link New York with Los Angeles resulted in the system going down.

Nonetheless, my discussions with the Computicket staff, particularly company president Nick Mayo who gave me a comprehensive verbal run-down on the system, convinced me that it was by far the most sophisticated of the three, and could quite easily be adapted to South African requirements. I found the concept awesome in its revolutionary possibilities, and was convinced that the first entrepreneur to introduce it in South Africa would probably preclude any competition. Excited, I left for Los Angeles where I could actually see the system at work.

In LA a personal assistant was assigned to me full-time, and we set off on a tour of Computicket terminals, most of which weren't working when we got there. I met the executives of the Computer Sciences Corporation at their headquarters, and was introduced to the sole remaining designer of their booking system. Hungry for knowledge and understanding, I spent a day travelling with a repair technician, an extremely depressing experience as the sheer volume of breakdown at the various terminals was frightening. The Computer Sciences people told me that no
mechanical system could operate as fast as a manual operator, which caused me to wonder why they - or I - were bothering; and the Computicket staff were fascinated to learn that in South Africa customers chose their seats rather than having to take what they were given. Everybody was at pains to impress upon me that nothing mechanical was perfect, and problems were inevitable.

It puzzled me that all this money was being spent and, yet nobody could actually run the booking system in a way which made sense. It seemed particularly suited to Los Angeles, a sprawling city with no integrated public transport system, very similar in fact to Johannesburg, and I was determined to pursue the possibilities I could recognise.

In between spending hours on the Los Angeles freeways, travelling from one non-working terminal to another, my 'assistant' decided to give me the Hollywood treatment, doing her best to impress me with lunches at smart restaurants where the movie colony dined. She seemed to know everybody, and though I never let on, I was impressed - more so than by the system she was trying to sell me- when she introduced me to a number of stars, among them Rod Steiger, Simone Signoret, James Stewart, Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas.

I saw some marvellous plays in Los Angeles, of which the most memorable was Sal Mineo's production of *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, whose cast included a nineteen-year old actor named Don Johnson, the future star of *Miami*
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Vice and husband several times over to Melanie Griffith. I also went to the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, imported from London with Janet Suzman starring as Beatrice. After the show, I went backstage to compliment Janet on a scintillating performance. As I was about leave her dressing room, in walked Mrs Miniver and Elizabeth Bennet. Yes, it was the lovely, flame haired Greer Garson, my long-time screen idol in person. I delayed my exit so as to be introduced to her. I forgot all about computer systems, and regressed to being a star-struck boy from Benoni.

On my way home, I stopped off for a brief visit to my brother Sammy and his family in London, and saw that Judy Garland was appearing at The Talk of the Town. A lifelong fan, I immediately arranged tickets, which involved us having dinner and watching a Robert Nesbitt nightclub extravaganza before the great star's appearance at 11 p.m. Eleven came and went and the audience grew restless and rowdy. Half-an-hour later than scheduled, the diminutive Judy, looking sad and bewildered, began her cabaret in shaky voice. Gradually she seemed to gain in confidence and delivered her signature tune, 'Over the Rainbow', to a mostly warm reception. Then, to my horror, certain people in the front row started jeering and throwing articles such as cigarette packs at her, causing her to burst into tears and flee.

Absolutely incensed, I sought out the club's manager, and made my feelings known in no uncertain terms. He was
totally unconcerned and said that that sort of thing had been going on every night. It was not only an insult to Garland, a sublime and special artist, and an agony to her fans, but marked the tragic end of a career and a life that had been dogged with unhappiness. Shortly afterwards, Judy died from an overdose in the Savoy Hotel, London. She was forty-six years old.

I returned to Johannesburg and wrote a report for David Abramson and Peter Campbell on what I had learned of computerised booking systems. We decided that once the Computicket system was operational in New York, Nick Mayo should come to Johannesburg to give his assessment of the South African market. Until this time, there was nothing further I could do, and it was back to piles of plans, coloured pencils, mountains of ticket books, harassed booking clerks and endless queues.

One of the first of these was for the second tour by Vera Lynn, here again for the Quibells, with comedian Tommy Trinder (his fifth South African visit) on the supporting bill. Their presence conveniently coincided with the Johannesburg Film Society's annual awards dinner of which I was the organiser, and Vera, her husband Harry Lewis, and Tommy agreed to be our guests of honour. It was one of the Film Society's best evenings- Vera and Harry made delightful speeches, and Tommy, a major star in his day, kept the guests in stitches.

An important era in Johannesburg’s theatrical history
was about to end. After some years of fighting rising costs and falling revenue in their own Alexander Theatre, the Reps were about to be no more. They presented their last season in 1969, beginning with Shaw's Androcles and the Lion with Noël Coward's *Red Peppers* as a curtain-raiser. Charles Hickman, well-known in London's West End directed, with a miscast Davy Kaye starring, and another financial disaster was recorded. Hickman also directed Coward's *Present Laughter*, with Margaret Inglis, Bernard Brown, Jenny Gratus and Gordon Mulholland. It turned out to be the final production by the Reps. The Alexander remained available to other managements for hire, and in 1972 PACT took on the lease long-term. By 1996, the Alexander was once again in crisis.

PACT stepped into the breach in 1969, providing the remainder of the Alexander's productions for the year. It was a heavyweight season: Roy Sargeant directed Pinero's *The Magistrate* with John Hayter in the title role; Robert Mohr came from Cape Town to direct Joe Stewardson in King Lear and Siegfried Mynhardt as Hadrian VII, while Leonard Schach was responsible for *A Month in the Country* with Vivienne Drummond, Erica Rogers, Kerry Jordan and Siegfried Mynhardt among the cast. TRUK supplied *Die Drie Van der Walts* directed by Francois Swart, and an Afrikaans translation of *The Merchant of Venice* directed by Anna Neethling-Pohl with Carl Trichardt as Shylock.

PACT's opera season included a genuine 'first' with the
South African premiere of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Crimes*. Victor Melleney directed, Leo Quayle conducted and Gert Potgieter sang the title role in a work which had taken twenty-three years to get here since its London premiere at Sadler’s Wells.

In ballet, too, PACT kept the flag flying, with Denise Schultze and Louis Godfrey (who later married) the newly appointed Ballet Masters. Belgian dancer and choreographer Paul Grinwiss arrived to stay for a year during which he staged five of his ballets. John Hart came from London to produce Ashton's *La Fille mal gardée*, danced by Royal Ballet stars Merle Park, Anthony Dowell and Petrus Bosman, and Galina Samsova returned in *Swan Lake* - a ballet always guaranteed to sell out.

Other than the international classical music soloists whose flow continued unabated, PACT was almost solely responsible for serious theatre and music. Otherwise, the preoccupation with lighter entertainment continued, perhaps reflecting a national state of mind that wanted to forget the troubles of the country.

In this climate, the Academy continued to hit the jackpot with Rex Garner's productions of *Chase Me Comrade* and *The Man Most Likely To*, which starred West End actor Leslie Phillips who was an intriguing combination of debonair and vulgar. The Academy also spread its wings, leasing the Brooke Theatre for a revival of *The Boy Friend* with Jo-Ann Pezarro. This marked Richard Loring's debut on the South African stage. Guernsey-born,
Richard had studied music and drama at London's Guildhall College, and appeared in several West End musicals and in Richard Attenborough's film of *Oh! What a Lovely War* before coming here. We met the weekend he arrived, and I took him to one of Jack and Rhoda Schneider's Sunday lunch parties. We've remained friends ever since and, more importantly, he has become a popular cornerstone of Johannesburg's show business fraternity.

The Brooke Theatre seemed to be permanently in the grip of light comedy in those boycott years. Margaret Inglis starred in *Roar Like a Dove* directed by Petrina Fry, and Petrina appeared in Harvey, directed by Rex Garner, with Brian as the man who talks to his imaginary rabbit. And Toerien-Rubin, embarking on a new policy of importing complete productions from the West End, kicked off with a classic, but one distinguished for its witticisms- Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, starring Richard Todd, Jean Kent, Vanessa Lee, Peter Graves, Derek Bond, and South Africa's Joyce Grant (resident in London). This was Vanessa Lee's first visit since *Perchance to Dream* twenty-five years earlier.

At the Alexander, Pieter and Basil brought the small-scale, witty and tuneful American musicals parody, *Dames at Sea*. As had happened in London, this delightful show failed to catch on with local audiences. The all-American cast and their New York director, Don Liberto, were nevertheless wonderful company. Graham and I had jointly leased a new townhouse that year, thus ending my
peripatetic existence in hotels, and we much enjoyed entertaining them at weekends.

For the first but not the last time, Pieter and Basil also brought out Jimmy Edwards, the British comedy actor with the famous handle-bar moustache. They staged Jimmy’s long-running London hit *Big Bad Mouse*, with Cardew Robinson and local actress Bess Finney in support. Jimmy was so impressed with Bess' hilarious performance as the sex-starved secretary that he took her on tour with him in future productions round the world.

Laughter was also the byword at the Intimate where a new management appeared- Toerien, Rubin and Shirley Firth. Shirley, because she held the lease of the theatre, had been approached by Pieter with a proposal to join him and Basil in presenting plays there. The following year, Toerien and Rubin would sever their business partnership, leaving Toerien-Firth in a partnership that would nurture some sixty productions over thirteen years, and see the inauguration of two new theatres. This first co-production at the Intimate was *The Secretary Bird*, directed by Kerry Jordan and starring Jeremy Hawk, a polished and attractive West End actor, with Shelagh Holliday, Ivan Berold and Shirley Firth. It was a heartening success for Shirley, appearing for the first and last time in a play for which she was also the management, playing to packed houses for forty weeks, and turning away hundreds of customers, almost including Hollywood actress Dorothy McGuire and
her husband, who only saw the show because Shirley overrode the fireman's objections and put two chairs in the aisle.

A few seats were available for *The Secretary Bird* on 20 July 1969 because most of the nation was at home glued to the radio to hear the historic Moon Landing. The Wits University Planetarium, realising the potential of a television-free country, hired the BBC TV footage to show us what we had missed. I joined the queues at the Planetarium, waiting for almost two hours to get in, after which experience I went to see the Planetarium's director and suggested that he hand over the screenings to Show Service for advance booking, which would make the whole operation more efficient and less painful. He agreed, and we had even more queues to deal with down at Rand Central.

Patti Page, the singer with the lopsided hairdo, who had chalked up numerous recording hits such as 'The Tennessee Waltz', and, most famously perhaps, ' [How much is that] Doggie in the Window?' came to the Civic for the Quibells. And talking of 'doggies', a gentleman who had booked two tickets for JODS' production of South Pacific arrived at the Civic with his companion, his beloved Basset hound. The customer's pleadings on behalf of the dog who, he said, loved musicals, especially *South Pacific*, would not budge the manager who insisted that theatre customers must have only two legs and, with total disregard for the niceties, told the pair to 'voetsak.' I was in the building and
was called to sort it out, which I did by refunding the money and sending the disappointed dog and owner on their way. It did occur to me that we were perhaps missing out on a potential new audience ...

The production was staged by Brickhill-Burke, with designs by Keith Anderson, for JODS' fiftieth anniversary. Inia te Wiata returned to play Emil de Becque, with June Hern as Ensign Nellie Forbush, and Jim Stodel's daughter Jean Dell as Bloody Mary. James White was Lieutenant Cable and, though most of the audience cried when he died, the more critical cried when he tried to sing the wistful 'Younger than Springtime'. A fine actor, James is no singer, and I can't recall that he attempted a musical again. The show ran thirteen weeks, a JODS record, during which Inia had to surmount the controversy which broke over the selection of Maori players for the All Blacks rugby tour.

Six months after my trip to New York, Computicket's Nick Mayo came out to Johannesburg for further discussions, in which it was intended to involve David Abramson. However, with David heavily occupied with the listing of his company on the Stock Exchange, I took Nick to the Game Reserve with high hopes of a positive outcome, only to learn that he was unable to provide any assurances that the system had improved since I'd seen it. That in itself didn't necessarily mean that we couldn't get it to work here, but any further planning foundered when costs were discussed. Mayo quoted a capital outlay of eight-thousand
dollars per terminal, plus a cool investment of a million dollars for the software - all for a system which could not yet be considered up to scratch. Nick went back home; I went back to the office and square one.

I was immensely saddened by the death of my good friend Frank Loesser. With his passing, the American musical lost one of its most inspirational composers. But life goes on and, in Johannesburg, Taubie Kushlick finally realised her ambition to direct two great contemporary American musical hits, *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Cabaret*. Most unhappily, for the profession and for audiences, it was with these productions that Taubie came unstuck, exposing her areas of weakness.

With its book by Joseph Stein, music by Jerry Bock and lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, *Fiddler on the Roof* - major hit song, 'If I Were a Rich Man' - needs no introduction. Produced on Broadway by Hal Prince in 1964, it starred Zero Mostel and ran for a record-breaking 3,242 performances. The Israeli actor Topol starred in the London production and the film version and, with its irresistible score, even my friend, the opera singer Jan Peerce, was persuaded to do a Broadway stint as Tevye.

For her production at the Empire in association with ACT, Taubie had gone to Israel amidst a blaze of publicity to find a Tevye for South Africa. She came back with Shimon Israeli who, as rehearsals progressed, revealed a fatal lack of charisma, little that could be called dynamism,
and English diction that simply wasn't up to the task. Instead of being the strong centre of the show, he was just another actor.

As Tevye's wife Golde, leading Israeli actress Lya Dulizkaya-a friend of Leonard's who became a treasured friend of mine-was a different story, a delight on stage as well as off, but she couldn't single-handedly give the show the excitement it lacked.

The show wasn't a sell-out, but it attracted decent business. However, we had to deal with the havoc caused by Jim Stodel allocating us the left-hand side of the Empire while ACT's booking office took the right-hand seats. Once again, my belief in centralisation was confirmed.

The Brooke Theatre was the chosen venue for *Cabaret* (music John Kander, lyrics Fred Ebb), based on Christopher Isherwood's stories and John Van Druten's play, *I Am a Camera*, boasting a number of memorable songs aside from the famous title number.

Taubie made a number of critical misjudgements. Though she had known Anthony Farmer's set designs would be different from those of the original production, she disliked the result. This led to friction. Then, when choreographer Bonnie Walker arrived from New York she couldn't re-create the choreography because of the radical changes in design, a problem that resulted in unsatisfactory compromises.

Worst of all was the relationship between Taubie and her leading lady. English actress Amanda Barrie came out to play the plum role of Sally Bowles (which won Liza Minnelli an Oscar for the film version). Taubie met her at the airport where she seemed
so odd and unwell that the director was moved to enquire whether she was perhaps pregnant. This did not go down well - the actress was in fact drunk - and matters deteriorated steadily from then on. The rehearsal bickering became so bad that a friend of Amanda's, who was clearly as unstable as she, threatened to stab Taubie with a screwdriver at four o'clock one morning.

The backstage operation was understaffed, leaving Tony Farmer to join the boys in the roof to fly the sets in and out. After three nights of this, he declared that he wasn't a stagehand and walked out. Wendy de la Harpe, Bonnie Walker's assistant on the show, recalls that watching Taubie at work with actors was magic, but technical problems eluded her grasp - and boy, did she have technical problems on this one. It was by common consent one of the unhappiest of shows for all connected with it, though the reviews really weren't too bad. Nonetheless, audiences were sparse and Taubie, with her inimitable knack for finding an imaginative explanation for her shortcomings, always maintained that *Cabaret* was ahead of its time!

After the dramas of *Fiddler* and *Cabaret*, it was a relief to go on tour again in September. The occasion was the arrival of Rita Streich, the internationally acclaimed German coloratura soprano, who came out for Musica Viva. A star of every major opera house in the world, Miss Streich was known as 'The Nightingale of Europe'. Her effortless technique, superb musicianship, sparkling presence and an ability to sing in a bewildering variety of languages moved the *Rand Daily Mail* critic to call her voice 'a connoisseur's delight, to be delicately enjoyed as old cognac is savoured by the palate'.

Like Victoria de los Angeles, Rita was accompanied by
Geoffrey Parsons, and it was both a happy and a successful tour, during which I got to know the soprano well. Describing herself as an ordinary housewife and mother by nature, she talked much about the loneliness of international fame, and the immense efforts of discipline required to sustain the touring life and the standard of singing. Her phone bills were astronomical since not a day passed without her calling her husband and son at home in Germany. Working with Rita Streich certainly extended my own musical knowledge: she had a most unusual repertoire of songs, and also chose the less performed operatic arias.

The year saw an unusual and heart-warming success for actor Patrick Mynhardt, whom I met when he returned from a spell in England in 1961. Someone offered to sell him a car they had won in a competition at a knock-down price, but Patrick was broke. Sure that he would be good for the loan (he was) I lent him the money, and we've been firm friends ever since.

In 1969, Patrick put together a one-man show, *A Sip of Jerepigo*, based on the works of Herman Charles Bosman. He had a three-week booking at the Pieter Roos Theatre at the Civic, with tickets priced at a mere rand which bought a seat, a programme and a sip of Jerepigo. When opening night came, only seventeen tickets had been bought, and the rest of the run wasn't looking too healthy. I advised a disconsolate Patrick to hang in ... the three-week season lasted for two years.

I had a pair of cuff links made to commemorate Patrick's hundredth performance. At my farewell at the Civic, where he made a wonderfully amusing speech, he was wearing the cuff links after all those years. I was surprised and delighted. This splendid actor and warm life-loving man began starring in his first ever TV sitcom, *Suburban Bliss*, in 1995 but Jerepigo, and his
other one-man show, _The Boy from Bethulie_, are still constantly to be seen somewhere in the country.

By 31 December 1969, exactly one year to the day since I had flown off in search of a computerised booking system, though styles, fashions and the nature of entertainment were changing everywhere, at Show Service everything remained the same. I went into 1970 wondering whether I would ever achieve my now firm goal of introducing a new way of selling tickets.
1 At home in Benoni, maternal grandparents Manzie and Malla Goldstein seated, parents, Ray and Harry and, left to right, Sammy, Mosie and Percy.

2 Benoni brothers, left to right, Percy, Sammy, Mosie.

3 Percy, 1960. Prior to visiting USA on business for the first time.
JUST THE TICKET!
1 The Standard Theatre building in its last years.
2 The Empire. Forbidding without, delights within.
3 Gracie Fields.
4 Mini-Broadway: The deco Colosseum, His Majesty’s crowned in the night sky.
5 Actor-manager Hendrik Hanekom and
6 his wife Mathilde.
Great ladies of the stage
1 Gwen Frangcon-Davies.
2 Marda Vanne.
3 Mariel Alexander, founder of the Reps.
4 Marjorie Gordon.
Classic theatrical moments

1. ‘Alas, poor Yorick...’ André Huguenet as Hamlet.
2. Johann Nell as Germanicus.
1 Berdie Grunewald in "Arms and the Man."
2 Leonine Sagan, a major influence.
3 Taubie Kushlick as Regina in "The Little Fockers."
4 Minna Schneier (Mrs Sydney Winik).  
5 The lovely Moira Lister.
6 Percy's mother, Leonard Schach, Ethel and Zelma
   London. Opening night of the Playhouse Theatre.
JUST THE TICKET!

1 In Vienna on the theatre tour with Brian Stofel and Louise Ockers.

2 Living in the opera queue in 1951 with, left to right, Hymie Groer, me, an onlooker, Harold Jurin and Stan Peskin.

3 Mossie's and Joyce wedding reception: left to right, Sam and fiancée Barbara Kaplan, the groom's parents, Mossie, Joyce and Percy.
Percy Tucker

1. Leon Gluckman (clockwise) artificially aged as King Lear and as Quentin in After the Fall with Erica Rogers.
JUST THE TICKET!
1 John Fraser and Dai Bradley in Equus.
2 Sarofagos – Jeremy Crutchley.
3 The opening of Les Misérables with Gail Jaffit-Leibman, Peter Toerien and Janet du Plessis.
4 Sarofima with Leleti Khumalo centre.
5 Sophiatown – the first cast.
1 Sarah Sylvia and Frank Wise in *A Majority of One*.
2 Petrina Fry, left and Jane Fenn in *The Heiress*.
3 *Harem's Eye View* – Joey Wishna's foot in the jelly with, left to right, Petrina Fry, Brian Brooke, Leanne Carnot, Michael Fisher.
1 Ivor Novello and Zena Dare in *Kings Rhapsody*.
2 John Boulter and Margaret Inglis in *Candida*.
3 Award-winning actress Anna Neelzhing-Pohl, with Percy Baneshik.
4 Percy with Victoria de los Angeles in Johannesburg.
1 Percy with Tamara Toumanova, Alex Cherniavsky and Jeremy Schulman.
2 Clifford Williams and Brian Proudfoot (front) and the cast of *The Winslow Boy*.
3 Percy with Margot Fonteyn, Attilio Labis, Joan Brickhill, and Louis Burke.
4 Phyllis Spira and Gary Burnie in *The Fanbird*.
5 Enrique Segovia and Mercedes Molina.
6 Emlyn Williams, author of *Simone Wisting*, took over from Siegfried Mynhardt at the Reps in October 1954 for three performances only, just for fun. Here, Siggy watches Emlyn make up before the show.
JUST THE TICKET!

1 The irrepressible Heather Lloyd-Jones in *Mary, Mary*.
2 Patrick Mynhardt as Bosman’s Oom Schalk Lourens.
3 Athol Fugard and Zakes Mokae in *The Blood Knot*, make theatrical history.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in the small mining town of Benoni, South Africa in 1928, Percy Tucker has devoted his life to nurturing and furthering the live arts and entertainment in his native South Africa and, in so doing, has forged mutually productive relationships with creative artists and managements across Europe, Britain and the USA.

The breadth of Percy’s interests, ranging from his first love – the theatre – through classical music in all its forms to ballet, modern dance, popular music, variety and spectacle, saw him become an integral figure in the show business industry in his country as advisor, councillor, mentor, organizer, impresario and innovator.

Internationally, he is known, above all, for the founding of Computicket, the world’s first fully operative computerized, centralized ticket-booking system, which he introduced in South Africa in 1971. For this concept and its realization, Percy Tucker has been extensively honoured as it changed forever the way tickets for entertainment was marketed worldwide.

Percy’s unique combination of passionate commitment to the arts with his commercial vision, business acumen and marketing skills has brought him recognition, love and respect that he never sought, and a richly fulfilling life which he treasures.

Since his official retirement in 1994, Percy has published his
autobiography-cum-history of the South African theatre, *Just the Ticket!* and remains actively involved in the entertainment industry as advisor, lecturer, board member and researcher, and continues to travel the world, ever alert to new horizons.
Percy has received the following awards and accolades during his distinguished career

1976
Marketing Man of the Year by the Institute of Marketing Management, South Africa

1993
The Moyra Fine Vita Award for lifetime contribution to theatre in SA

1994
On his retirement from Computicket he was made Life Patron of Civic Theatre
First ‘life friend’ of Market Theatre
Further honours by The Star newspaper and Nu Metro Cinema Organisation

1997
Honoured by Computer Week, as perhaps the first business visionary in SA to recognise an opportunity arising from Networking Technology.

1998
Honoured by Box Office Management International (USA)

1999
Rotarian Vocational Service Award for outstanding service to the community in his chosen vocation.

2000
Computicket was included among the Top 100 Best creative ideas of the 20th Century, by The Star newspaper.

2002
Lifetime Achievement Award by Theatre Managements of SA.

2004
Computicket was chosen as one of the top 10 Great South African Inventions Exhibition held at MTN Science centre, Canal Walk, Cape Town. This exhibition also toured South Africa.

2005
Honoured by Rotary International with the ‘Paul Harris Fellowship Award’, their highest honour for his services nationally and internationally in changing forever the face of the marketing of entertainment.

2007
Fleur de Cap special merit award for Lifetime Contribution to South African Theatre.