

ENCOFF

A CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

# MY ONE GOOD NERVE

*written and performed by*

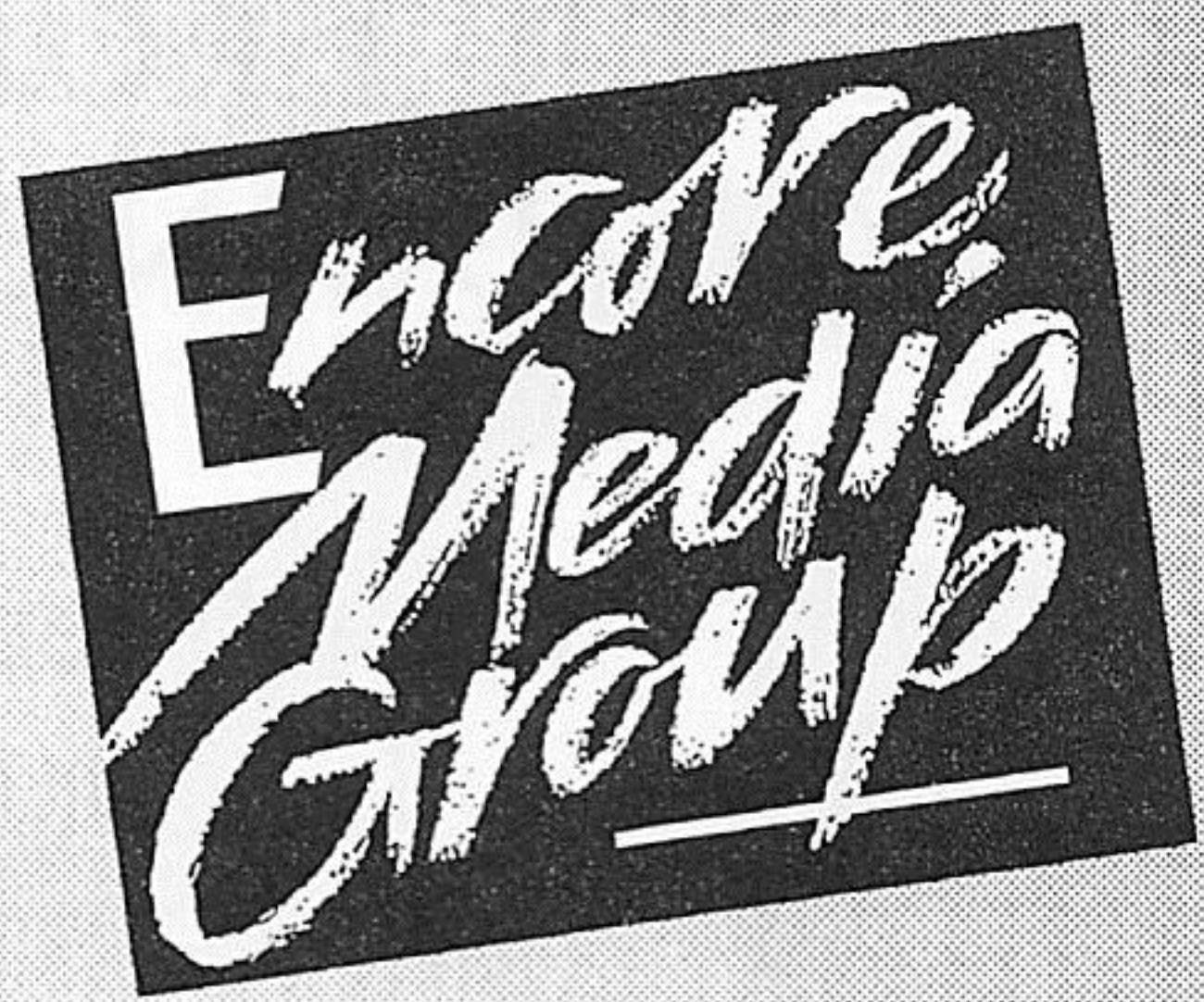
*Ruby Dee*

*directed by*

*Peggy Shannon*







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A CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

*Peggy Shannon, Artistic Director*

# MY ONE GOOD NERVE

*Written and Performed by  
Ruby Dee*

NOVEMBER 8 - DECEMBER 15, 1996

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Assistant Editor: Karen Rorie

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Illustration by Mike Kowalski

A Large Print version of this playbill is available from the House Staff.

*A Contemporary Theatre  
Kreielsheimer Place*

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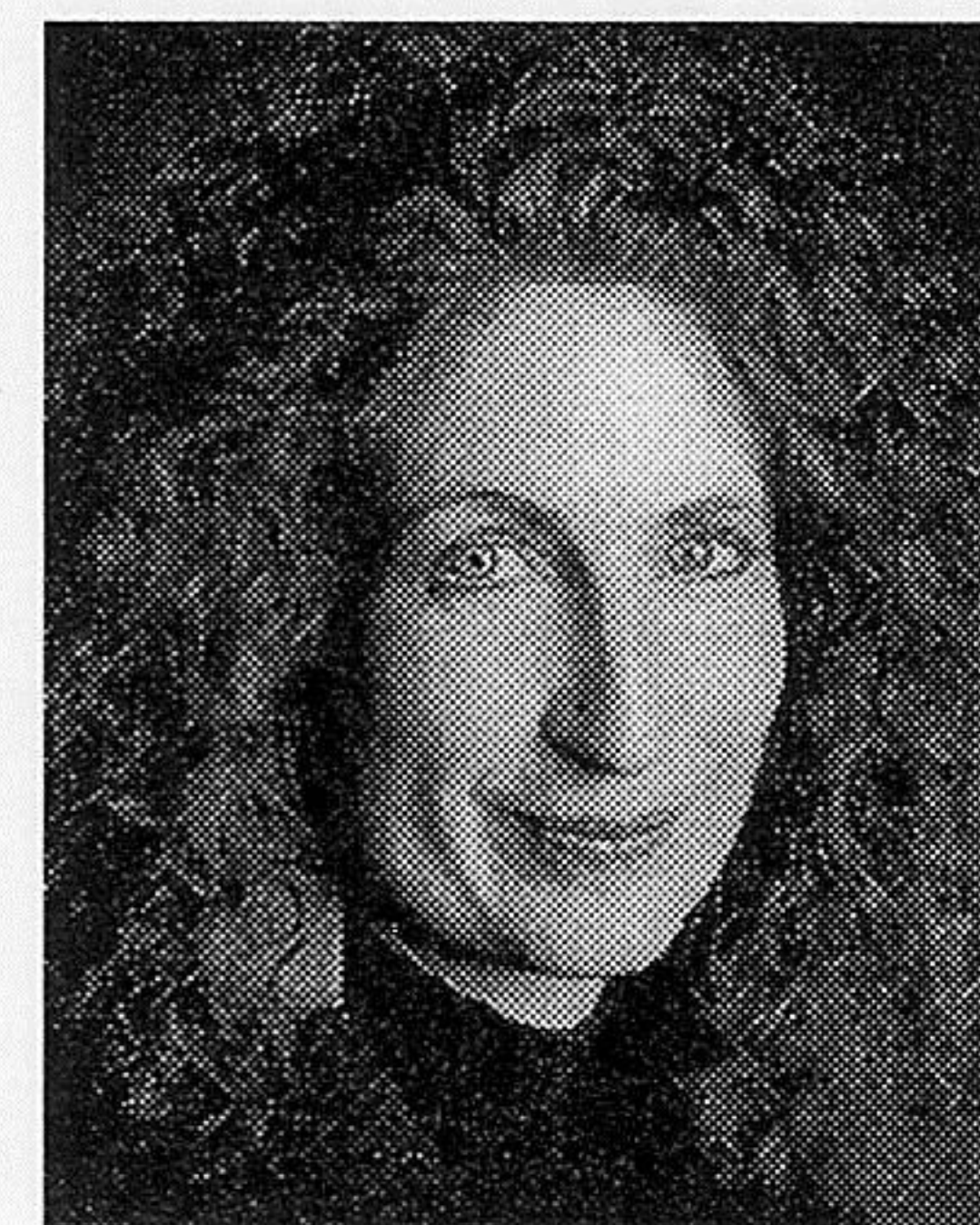
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## A LETTER FROM PEGGY SHANNON



Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that we are coming to the end of the 1996 season. It has been a time of exhilarating

change and exciting theatre. We have had such a positive response to all of the plays this season, beginning with *Arcadia*, *Avenue X*, and *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* in our Queen Anne home, to *Cheap* and *The Crimson Thread* in our new home. I want to say thank you again for your support and patronage. We couldn't have achieved this dream without you.

For the final offering of the year, I am extremely pleased to bring you one of this country's living theatrical legends. Ruby Dee is a powerful actress with an unique and timely voice. Her themes speak to all of us, regardless of race or gender, in a language that is both poetic and contemporary. Her work on the American stage and in film has been an inspiration to many. Her thoughts on life are refreshingly humorous, deeply spiritual and totally original.

Thanks again for being part of our historic year.

*Peggy Shannon*

Peggy Shannon  
Artistic Director



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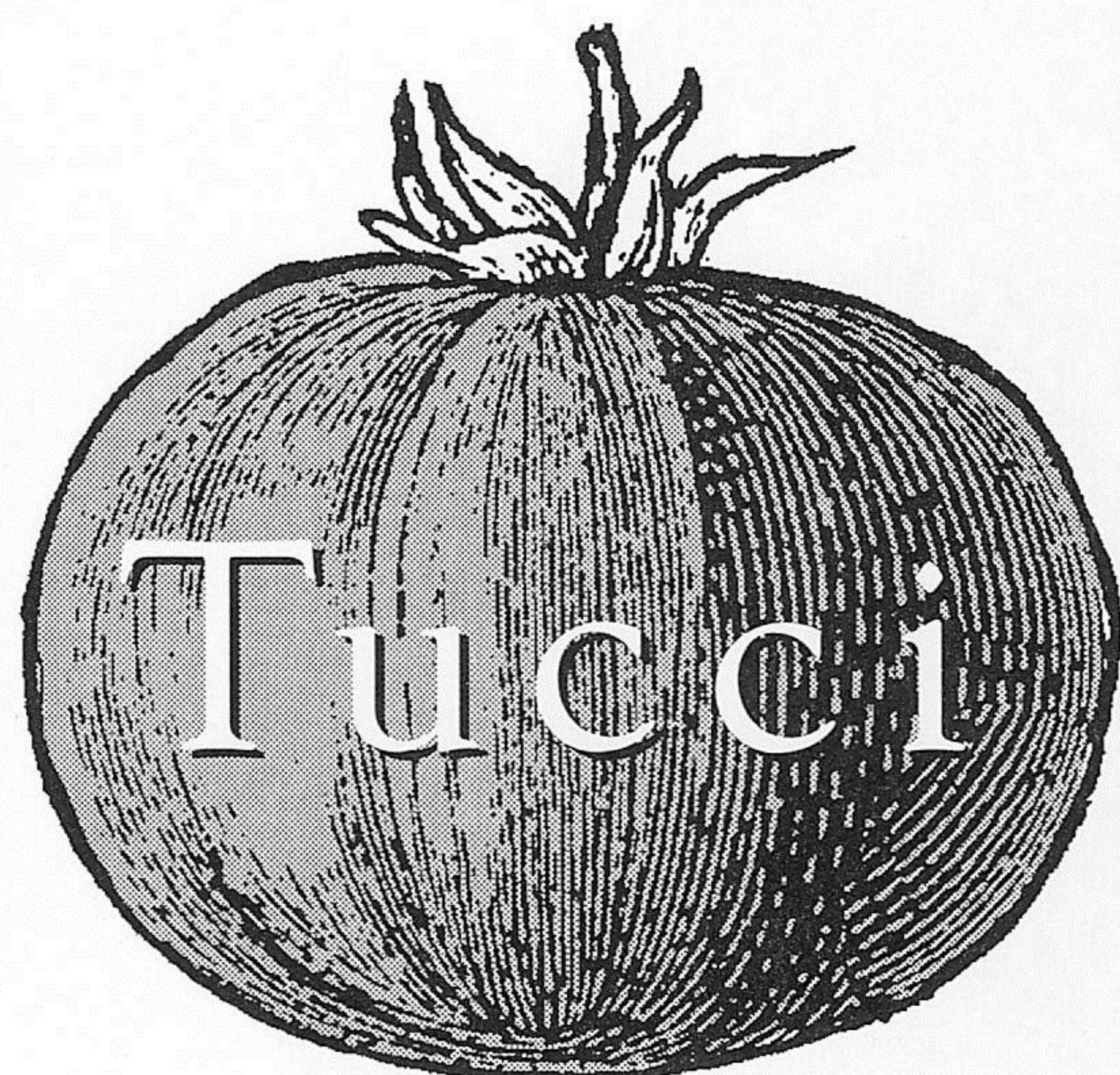




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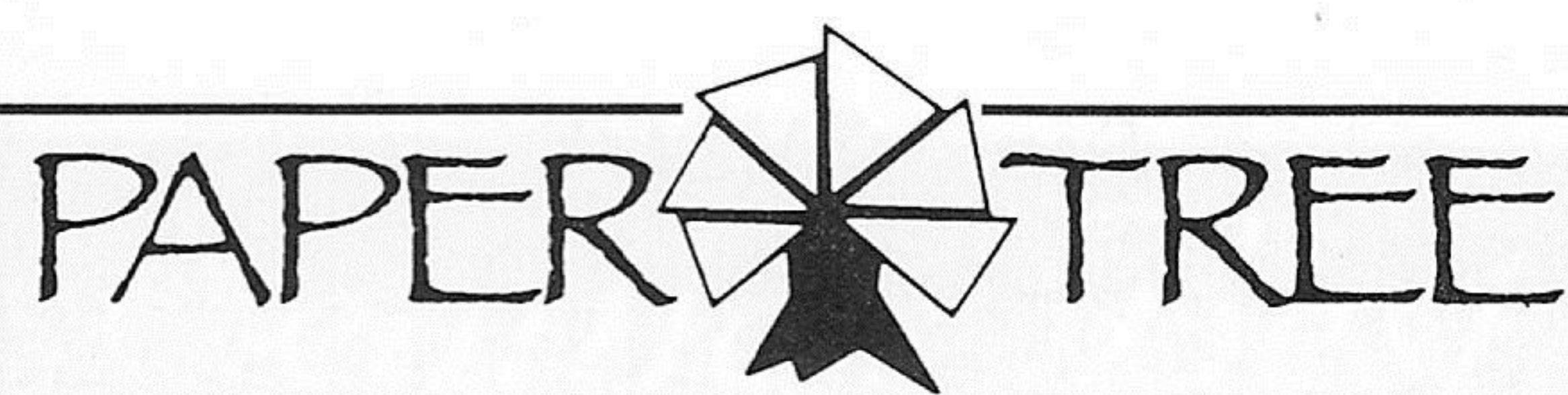
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## REMARKS BY OSSIE DAVIS

**T**he author...is not the same absolutely pure and sweet woman who was Nat King Cole's girlfriend in the film *The Saint Louis Blues*, or the fresh-faced bride of Jackie Robinson in *The Jackie Robinson Story*, or the long-suffering wife of Sidney Poitier in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Part of her, yes, is those women; but only part. Most women, I imagine — and surely Ruby — are a complex of many women. Few, perhaps, have remained as well hidden by only one facet of their personalities as has Ruby. Here is a Ruby Dee you may never have suspected. *My One Good Nerve* could very well have been written by a cross between Moms Mabley, Ruth Gordon, Whoopi Goldberg and the poet Bob Kaufman. Here is a mind that doodles with nursery rhymes, that turns popular themes upside down in unexpected stories and poems that are serious without half trying as they pay tribute, embrace or criticize. For example, the nursery rhymes — behind the chuckles — are comments about unemployment, loneliness, racism, housing, abortion, love and death. The stories are fantasies about over-population, growing old, looking for a hand-out from heaven, or eating pork. Some seem almost autobiographical as she writes about childhood memories or an experience in Hollywood. There is a real appreciation here of the people she salutes in poetry or in prose....

...Ruby, as a writer, is unique — one of a kind — which means she can only be compared with herself. Nothing about her work reminds me of anybody; all of it stands alone.

That does not mean that what she writes is esoteric, or exclusive, or private. Her meaning, her rhythm and her insights are not mysterious or enigmatic. What she has to say is wide open, free, immediately available to the curious. She has no puzzles which she dares the reader to solve. What she has to say is always public and will fit into any imagination — but only on Ruby's terms.

She tears the world apart as a child might do, and then, right before your eyes, she builds it back together again. The same old world, but through the poet's eyes — through Ruby's eyes — it looks brand new....

...Most of us grow up as quickly as we have to, getting further away by the day from who we were when we were children. We shorten our sails, temper our ambitions, and set aside our fondest expectations in order to face the day. But Ruby reminds us that a simpler world is only a thought away, with the light still glowing in undiminished vigor right in the middle of our secret mind. All we have to do is open the door...

In 1978, Ruby and Dick Hyman did an evening together at The Ballroom in New York's Greenwich Village. Dick graciously supported on piano as Ruby performed some of the pieces offered here. It was a unique, joyous, and sometimes moving experience, full of mouth-watering surprises. Unfortunately, there was a newspaper strike at the time so the world of journalism stayed away except for one reporter, Don Nelson, writing for a temporary publication called *City News*. His review was captioned: RUBY DEE ADDS HERSELF TO THE POETRY IN SOHO, and here is some of what he had to say: "...Dee draws the bones and blood from the poetic language. At times, she IS the poem, a living swirl of accents, textures, tones and pithy humor... Her own work tends toward impish satire, not only in her serious poetry but in her delightful variations on such nursery rhymes as 'Little Bo-Peep,' 'Jack and Jill,' and 'Twinkle, Twinkle.'" He seemed to take particular delight in hearing Ruby's poetry and stories out loud. I do too. And so, I think, will you.

Ossie Davis

*Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee married in 1948. The preceding is excerpted from his introduction to Ruby Dee's collection of poetry and prose, MY ONE GOOD NERVE (Third World Press, Chicago, 1987).*



## A STANDING OVATION FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS

The Staff at ACT wants to thank all of our dedicated volunteers who helped to make our move to Kreielsheimer Place, not to mention our day-to-day operations possible.

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### Take A Bow!

If you are interested in volunteering at ACT please call 292-7660.

## A MESSAGE FROM AT&T



AT&T is proud to sponsor *My One Good Nerve*, by Ms. Ruby Dee. We hope that you will enjoy this celebration and triumph of the human spirit. At AT&T, we believe that support of the arts enriches our lives and our communities and we are delighted to have the opportunity to support this production.

We are extremely pleased to work with A Contemporary Theatre. In a city where excellence is the standard, ACT stands out. And while we look forward to providing you with networking, on-line and wireless solutions for your business and home, we also revel in supporting those events that make our corner of the world, the Pacific Northwest, such a special place to live.

We hope that you will find humor and light, introspection and joy in tonight's performance.

## FROM THE DRAMATURG

When I first read the book *My One Good Nerve*, I was struck by something that Ossie Davis so poetically said of Ruby Dee in the introduction: "...Ruby reminds us that a simpler world is only a thought away, with the light still glowing in undiminished vigor right in the middle of our secret mind. All we have to do is open the door..." Ms. Dee opens the door for us with her words and their humor, integrity and no-holds-barred honesty in terms of her views of the ills of our world that could get on anybody's one last, good nerve.

I have long admired Ms. Dee for her strength of character, and her enormous talents as an artist and as a symbol of African-American womanhood. Contributing my thoughts to the theatrical presentation of her words has been an honor. Ms. Dee explores compelling themes of love, women and family, class, race and self-exploration; themes that hopefully touch all of our lives and catalyze in us that desire to heal ourselves and each other. Turn up the glow of your lamps and open a door...and another...and another.

*Velina Hasu Houston*

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School matinees are offered for many of ACT's productions. For details, please call 292-7660 and ask for School Group Sales Coordinator. Our thanks to **Seafirst Bank** for sponsoring this educational program.


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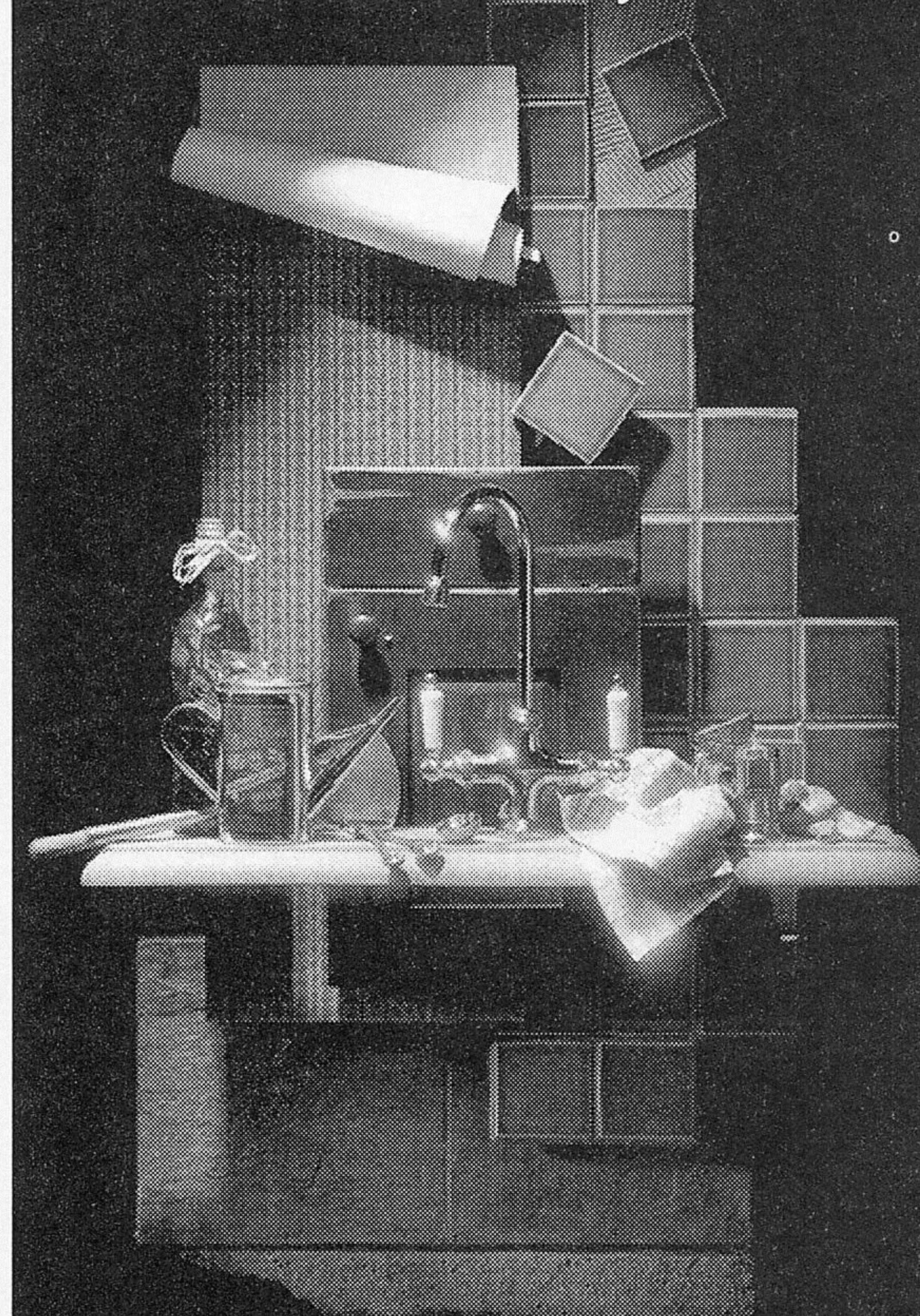
A black and white illustration of Pinocchio and Geppetto. Pinocchio is standing on the left, looking up at Geppetto, who is sitting on the right, holding a small object. They are in a room with a clock and a lamp.

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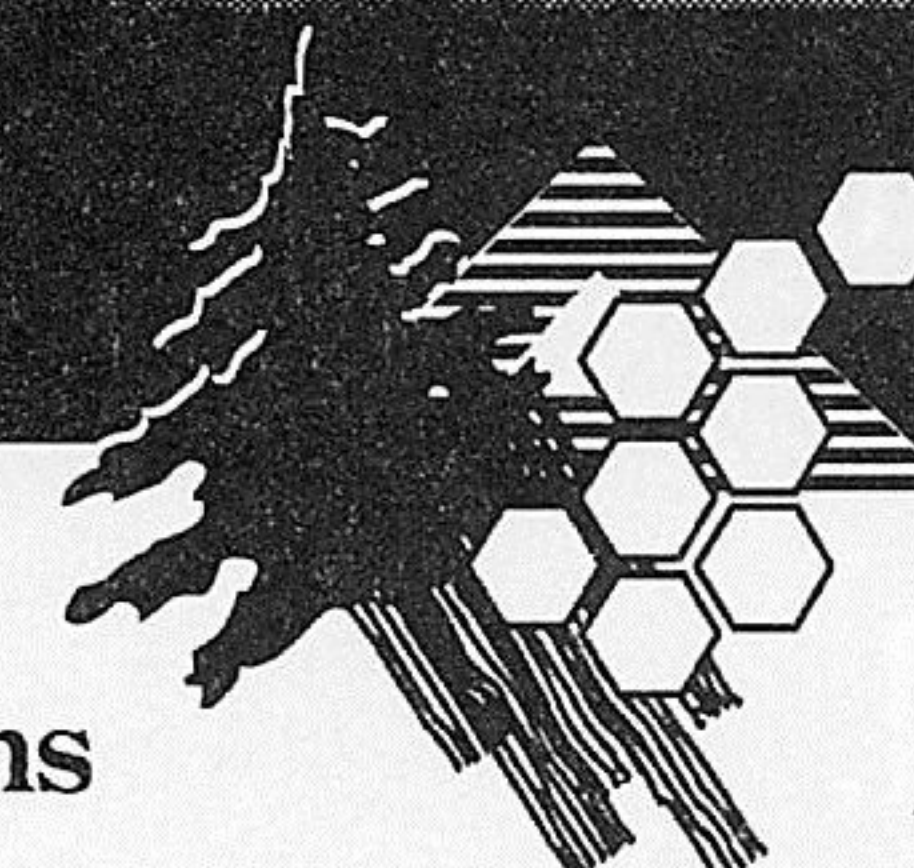
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*Artistic Director*

PHIL SCHERMER  
*Producing Director*

SUSAN BAIRD TRAPNELL  
*Managing Director*

GREGORY A. FALLS  
*Founding Director*

## MY ONE GOOD NERVE

*Written and Performed  
by Ruby Dee*

|                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| Director        | Peggy Shannon        |
| Set Design      | Bill Forrester       |
| Costume Design  | Sarah Nash Gates     |
| Lighting Design | Diane Ferry Williams |
| Sound Design    | Steven M. Klein      |
| Dramaturg       | Velina Hasu Houston  |
| Stage Manager   | John Kingsbury       |

Music and Vocals performed by Neal Jones and Michelle Lang  
Dialect assistance by Deena Burke

This production is based on the book of the same title, published by Third World Press in 1987.  
An earlier version of *My One Good Nerve* was workshopped at Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ.

*There will be one intermission.*

---

This production is made possible by a generous grant from



with additional support from King County Arts Commission.

A Contemporary Theatre is a member of the League of Resident Theatres, the American Arts Alliance, the Washington State Arts Alliance, and is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group. This theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States. Directors and choreographers at ACT are members of the Society of Stage Directors, an independent national labor union.

Understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.

Please check the castboard in the lobby for program changes.



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## RUBY DEE WRITER AND PERFORMER



Ruby Dee calls herself a word worker. "Ideas, too," she says. "I love language and authors and music and how it can all interconnect. As an actor I want to explore life rhythms and the sounds in the silences."

Dee was awarded an Emmy for her role in *Decoration Day*, a Hallmark Hall of Fame presentation. She was Mallie in *The Court Martial of Jackie Robinson*; acclaimed as author and player in *Zora is My Name* on American Playhouse; with her husband, Ossie Davis, in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* and *Jungle Fever*; on Broadway in the Woody King Jr. production of Ron Millner's *Checkmates*; and at the Arena Stage in D.C.

as Amanda in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Dee starred as Susanne in the Great Lakes Theatre Festival production of Adrienne Kennedy's play *The Ohio State Murders*, directed by Gerald Freedman. Dee's recent stage accomplishment involved her work as both adaptor and narrator for Crossroads Theatre Company's production of *The Disappearance*, a novel by Rosa Guy. The first in a series Dee calls *Books With Legs*, this new presentation of the novel creates a symphonic relationship between reading and dramatization, marrying both thought and word rhythms to music. Dee has appeared in the play *Flyin' West*, by author Pearl Cleage produced by Crossroads Theatre and mounted at the renowned Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. She was recently seen in the suspense thriller, *Just Cause*, with Laurence Fishburne and Sean Connery.

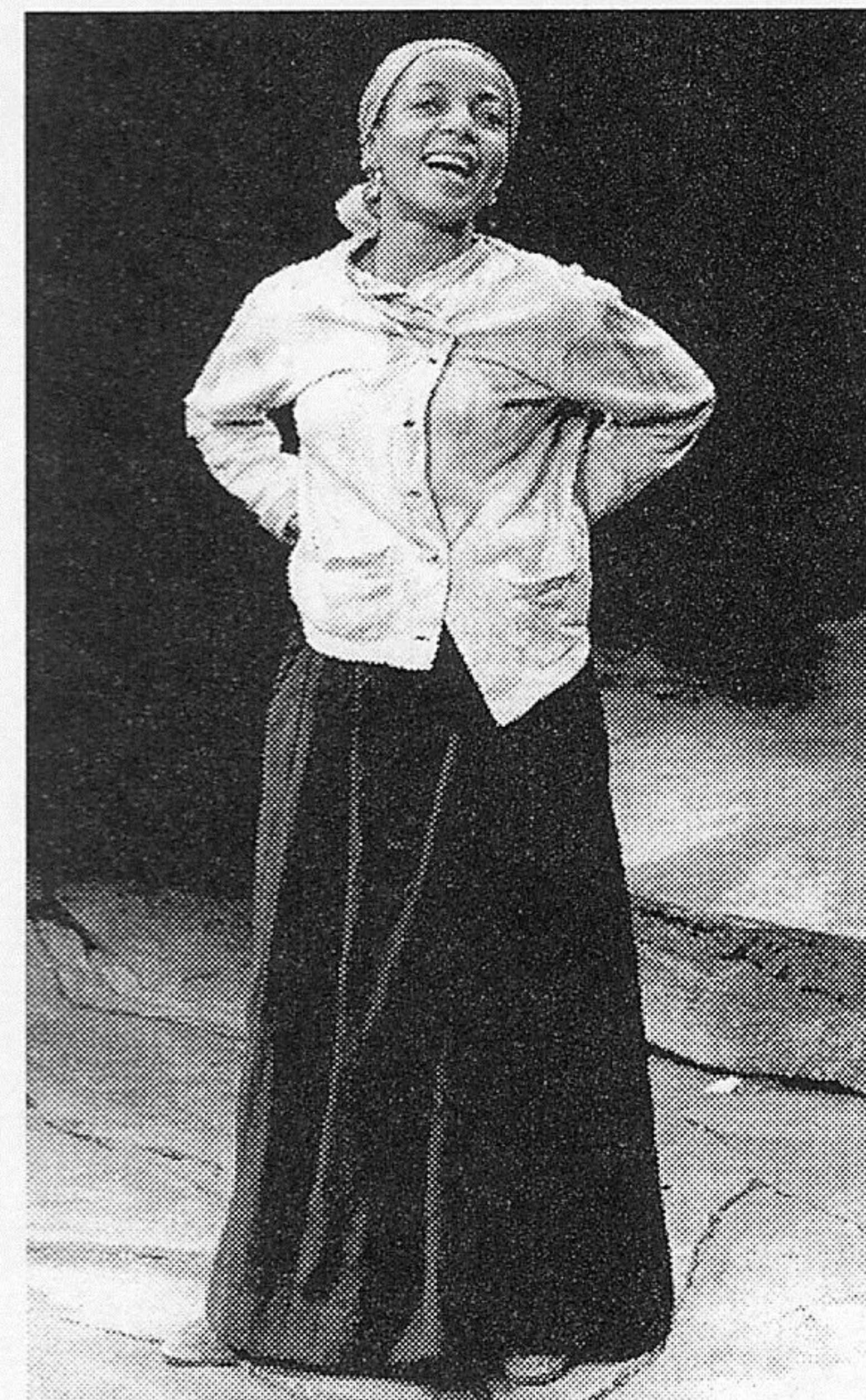
Some of her favorite roles have been LutieBelle in *Purlie Victorious* (stage and film), written by her husband Ossie Davis; as Lena in Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena*, for which she received an Obie; as Julia in Alice Childress' *Wedding Band* for the N.Y. Shakespeare Festival (a Drama Desk Award); on television as Mary Tyrone in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (an ACE Award); and as Ruth in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Cordelia in *King Lear* and Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* at the American Shakespeare Festival in Connecticut, and Cassandra in *The Agamemnon* for the Greek Ypsilanti Theater in Michigan are some memorable opportunities with the classics.

Other treasured experiences include working with husband Ossie Davis and son Guy Davis in the storytelling, folklore and music revue *Two Hah Hahs and a Homeboy*. Compiled by Dee, the program draws on her own works, the original writings of her husband and son as well as anthropologist/folklorist Zora Neale Hurston. Additional treasures include such films, plays and/or television productions as *Buck and The Preacher* (a Sidney Poitier film); Alex Haley's *Roots*, *The Next Generation*; Lorraine Hansberry's *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*; *The Atlanta Child Murders*; *Reading Rainbow*; *The World of Sholom Aleichem*; James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*; *Uptight*, a Jules Dassin film; and *Take It From the Top* (a musical which she authored). Dee appears as Rachael in the movie *Cop and a Half* with Burt Reynolds, and was seen as Mother Abigail in the acclaimed TV miniseries, *The Stand*, by Stephen King. Most recently Dee appeared in *Tuesday Morning Ride* with Bill Cobb, an Oscar-winning adaptation of an Arna Bonomtemps classic.

Dee is also a writer. *My One Good Nerve* is a compilation of some of her short stories, humor and poetry. Dee is presently working on Volume II of this book. She has adapted two African folktales into books for children (Henry Holt & Co.): *Two Ways to Count to Ten*, illustrated by Susan Meddaugh, won the Literary Guild award in 1989, and *Tower to Heaven*, illustrated by Jennifer Bent, was released in 1991. *Glowchild* is a compilation of poetry for and by young people (Third World Press, N.Y.).

In 1988 Dee was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame, and in 1989, into the NAACP Image Award Hall of Fame. She has a BA from Hunter College and is also a product of Harlem and The American Negro Theater. She studied acting with Paul Mann, Lloyd Richards and Morris Carnovsky.

Through their company, Emmalyn Enterprises, Ruby Dee and husband Ossie Davis produced with PBS some of their best work — *Martin Luther King: The Dream and the Drum*; *A Walk Through the 20th Century with Bill Moyers*; and for three seasons the critically acclaimed series, *With Ossie and Ruby*, which they co-produced with KERA/Dallas



In Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena*



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tion, they  
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Kusini*, in  
Nigeria with  
the Delta  
Sigma Theta  
Sorority; and  
for CBS, *Today  
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program for  
young people based on Dee's book,  
*Glowchild*.



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performances for PBS; and *Purlie Victori-  
ous*, a 25th anniversary commemorative  
edition of Davis' original play. This book,  
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ographies and poetry are currently avail-  
able through the Emmalyn catalogue.

*Photos courtesy of Ruby Dee*

#### PEGGY SHANNON *Artistic Director*

Peggy has an extensive background as a direc-  
tor at many regional theatres, including the  
Alliance Theatre, The Seattle Repertory The-  
atre, Empty Space Theatre, San Jose Repertory  
Theatre, the Los Angeles Theatre Center, L.A.  
Theatre Works, Oregon Shakespeare Festival;  
Colorado Shakespeare Festival, New Jersey  
Shakespeare Festival, Idaho Shakespeare Festi-  
val, California Shakespeare Theatre, the Port-  
land Repertory Theatre, the Old Vic National  
Youth Theatre, and Stirabout Theatre (Lon-  
don). For two years Peggy was the Associate  
Producing Director of L.A. Theatre Works.  
During that time she co-produced and/or  
directed 36 new plays for National Public Ra-  
dio; playwrights represented by this project  
include Tom Topor, Velina Hasu Houston,  
Joyce Carol Oates, Larry Gelbart and Robert  
Schenkkan. Peggy has extensive teaching cre-  
dentials and has been a guest artist at the Uni-  
versity of Washington, UCLA, USC, Loyola  
Marymount, and San José State University,  
among many others. In 1994, she was the Ar-  
tistic Director of the School of Theatre at  
USC. She has an MFA in Directing from the  
University of Washington and trained as an  
actress in London, where she lived and worked  
for six years. She is a member of the Society of  
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## DIRECTORS AND PRODUCTION STAFF

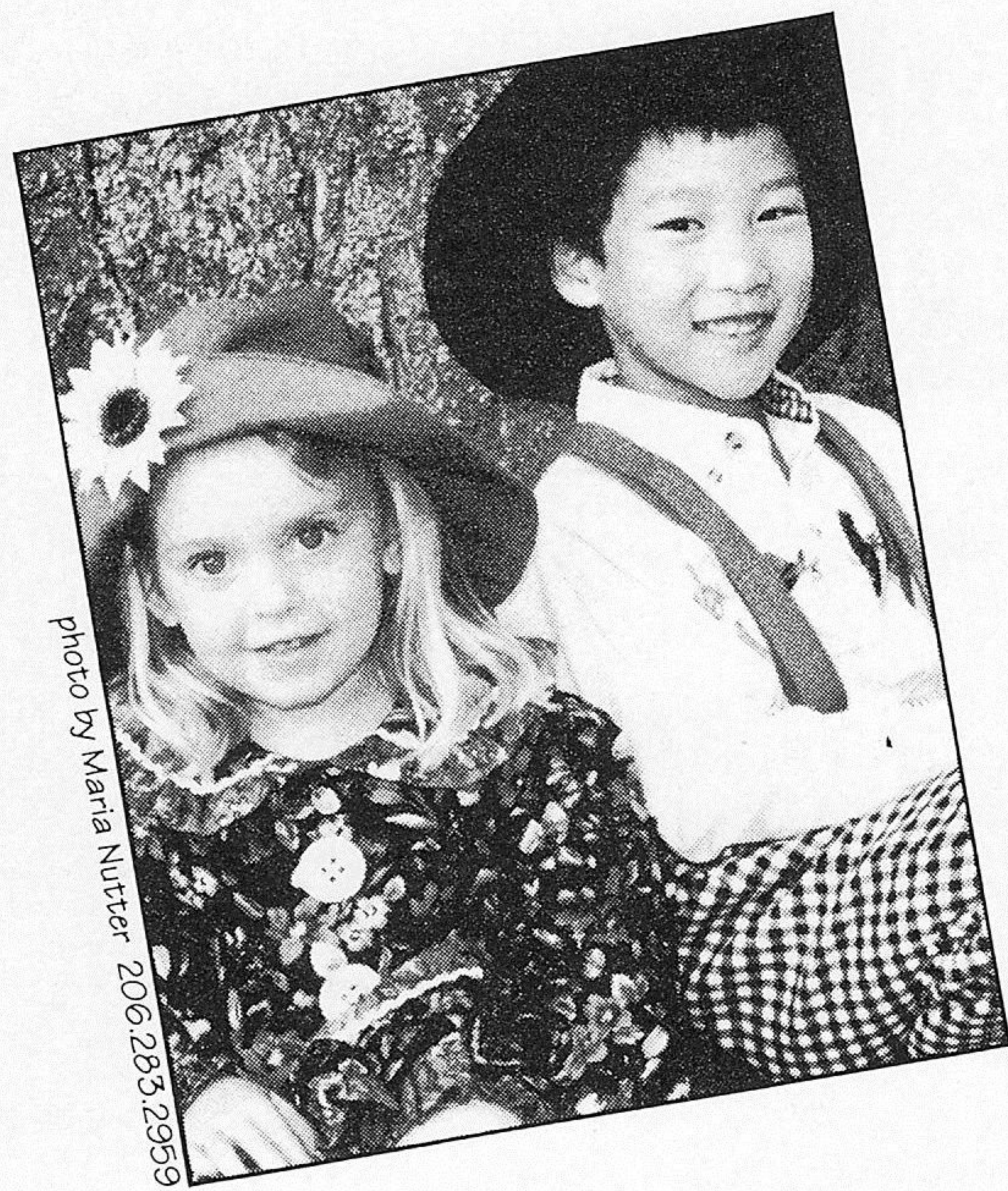


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### SUSAN BAIRD TRAPNELL *Managing Director*

Susan joined ACT in 1982 as administrative manager and became managing director in 1989. Susan holds a BA in French from the University of North Carolina and attended the University of Lyons in France. She also did graduate work in dance education at George Washington University. Prior to coming to ACT, Susan spent four years with Bill Evans Dance Company/ Dance Theatre Seattle as educational director and then general manager. She served as a UNESCO bilingual aide in Paris and held writing and editing positions in the Washington, DC, area. Other experience includes work with the National Urban League and a teaching position in Algeria. She is a member and past president of the Washington State Arts Alliance, a member of the King County Arts Commission, and a member of the Leadership Tomorrow class of 1992. Susan is a native of Arlington, Virginia.

### PHIL SCHERMER *Producing Director*

Phil has been working in professional theatre for over 30 years. He began his career at the Seattle Repertory Theatre as a painter and then scenic carpenter. He has also designed lighting and scenery for the Seattle Rep and its Second Stage, The Bathhouse Theatre, The Empty Space, The Seattle Group, Tacoma Actors Guild and Montana Repertory Theatre as well as numerous productions at ACT since 1966. He served as Technical Director and Production Manager at ACT before being named Producing Director in 1989. For the past 11 years, he has been actively involved in the acquisition and design process for ACT's new facility. Phil holds degrees from Reed College in Portland and the University of Washington.

### BILL FORRESTER *Scene Designer*

Bill first designed at ACT in 1973 with *The Decline and Fall of the Entire World as Seen through the Eyes of Cole Porter*. Since then he has designed a number of ACT productions including *Betty the Yeti*, *Shadowlands*, *A Walk in the Woods*, *Maydays*, *Woman in Mind*, *An American Comedy*, *The Voice of the Prairie* and *A Christmas Carol*. He has also designed for The Empty Space, Tacoma Actors Guild, Arizona Theatre Company, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Utah Festival Opera and the Honolulu Theatre for Youth.

### LESLIE SWACKHAMER *Associate Artistic Director, Director*

Leslie directed *Avenue X* and will direct *A Christmas Carol* later this season in ACT's new arena theatre. Last season, she directed *A Christmas Carol*, as well as *Later Life* by A.R. Gurney, and produced and directed for ACT's new play series, FirstACT. As artistic associate at The Cleveland Play House, she directed and dramaturged for the CPH new plays series, and directed on the mainstage and for the CPH Lab Company. Her *Japanese Ghost Stories* was featured in an international theatre festival in

Bratislava, Slovakia and *LOVE & SCIENCE: an AIDS Diatribe* by KC Davis toured theatres throughout Ohio. Numerous world premieres include Paul Monette's *A Country Beyond Tears* (Northern Ohio Live Award of Excellence), and Wendy Kesselman's *The Butcher's Daughter* (AT&T Onstage Award). Leslie has been a guest artist at Case Western Reserve University, the University of Washington, and the University of Southern California. The recipient of a 1996 TCG Observership in new play development, Leslie holds an M.F.A. in directing from the University of Washington.

### SARAH NASH GATES *Costume Designer*

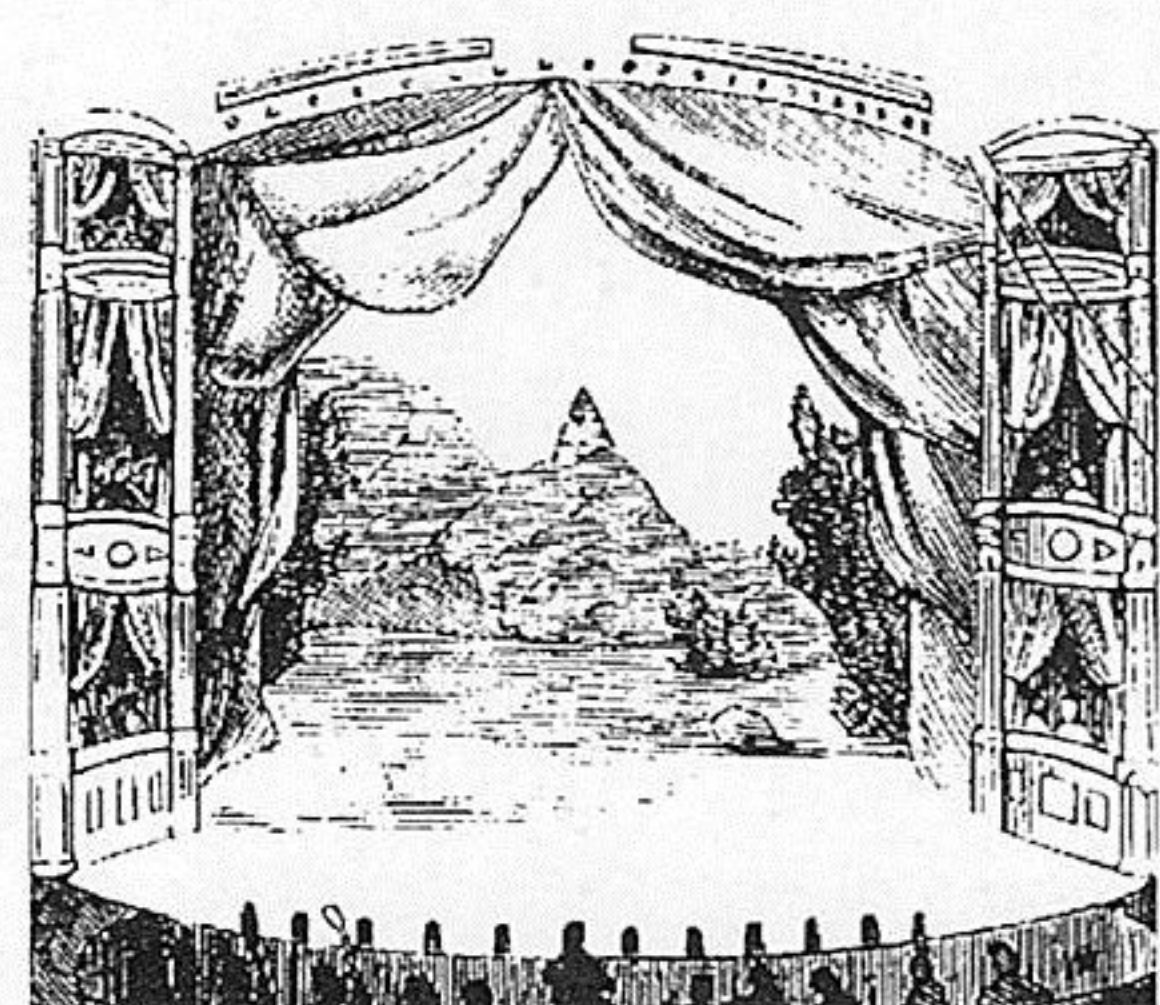
Sarah's designs last appeared at ACT in *Tea*, *Amadeus* and *Communication Cord*. Her work has been seen at Seattle Opera, Seattle Children's Theater, Intiman, and Alice B. In several seasons at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival she designed *Tempest*, *King John* and *Member of the Wedding* among others. Sarah has also designed for the Denver Center Theatre Co. and Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus. She honed her administrative skills as president of the U.S. Institute for Theatre Technology (1992-94) and now uses them as Executive Director of the U.W. School of Drama where she also teaches costume design.

### DIANE FERRY WILLIAMS *Lighting Designer*

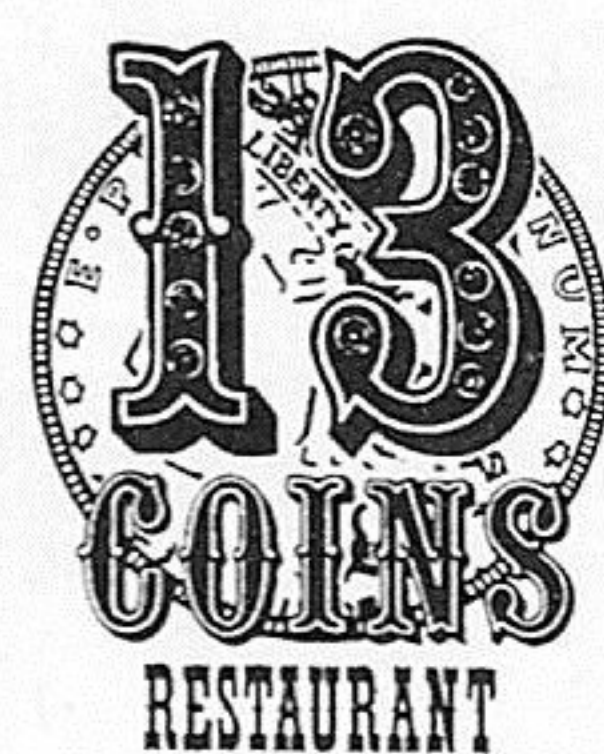
Diane has lit many productions in the United States and Europe. Recent designs include *The Glass Menagerie* at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, the world premieres of *Patsy!* at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in Toronto and *Sleepless Nights* in Minneapolis, and *In Stitches* and *The Harvey Milk Show* in Atlanta for the Olympics. Other recent work includes designs for Ballet Chicago, Ford's Theatre, The Goodman Theatre, Coconut Grove Playhouse, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, The Berlin Opera, The Mogador Theatre in Paris, and Marriott's Lincolnshire Theatre in Chicago, where she has been the resident lighting designer for the past ten years. Favorite designs include *Grand Hotel*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Falsettos*, *Once on this Island*, *Hot Mikado*, *Matador* and shows she co-designed with her late husband, John Williams, including the world premieres of *Encore*, *Grover's Corners*, and *History Loves Company*. Diane is from Chicago, has a MFA in Design from Northwestern University, and is a member of United Scenic Artists of America.

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Steve has been the sound designer for over a dozen ACT productions including *Hospitality*, *Betty the Yeti*, *Fish Head Soup* and *Life During Wartime*. He has also worked on productions at the Seattle Repertory Theatre, the Empty Space, Seattle Children's Theatre, Alice B. Theatre, Utah Shakespeare Festival and Intiman Theatre Company. His work can also be seen in ACT's newly re-designed version of *A Christmas Carol* in the Allen Arena.

VELINA HASU HOUSTON  
*Dramaturg*


Velina is an award-winning author of plays, screenplays, poetry, essays and books. Her signature play is *Tea* (ACT, 1995). Her plays have been presented at the Old Globe Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, The Kennedy Center, and many other theatres nationally and internationally. She has written screenplays and teleplays for Columbia Pictures, Sidney Poitier's Verdon-Cedric Productions, American Film Institute, PBS and others. Among her many honors she has been awarded the Remy Martin New Vision Award from Sidney Poitier and the American Film Institute, has twice been awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship, and was named one of the top 100 Asian Americans of 1991 by *Transpacific* magazine. She heads the playwriting program at the University of Southern California.

JOHN KINGSBURY  
*Stage Manager*

John has staged managed at The Old Globe Theatre, The Alley Theatre, PCPA, The Shakespeare Theatre and Seattle Rep. Productions at ACT include *Das Barbecü*, *Avenue X*, and *Cheap*. John has also served as production manager at Seattle Rep, The Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger and PCPA/Theaterfest; associate professor at the University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee; director for *Greater Tuna* and *Season's Greetings*; and designer for Greek Active's *The Best Man* and *King John*. As a Fulbright recipient John was also the managing director for ART and associated with De Nederlandse Opera in Amsterdam.

The cast and stage manager of this production are members of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.

  
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(subject to change)

### PART I

Word Monger

Word World

Doodle on Love

Love Stew\*

Selections from Ruby Goose

De-Creation

While Waiting

I Just Couldn't\*\*

Daughter

A Real -True Love Story - A

Duologue

Mamie Phipps Clark

Calling All Sisters

### PART II

Remembrance

I Am Somebody

Time To

Owed to a Funny Man (with music

from *Lift Every Voice and Sing* by

James Weldon Johnson)

For Spike Lee

Marvin Gaye

Tupac

I Miss the Russians

Winnie and Nelson Mandela

Dream Droppers

My One Good Nerve

C'mon Now

\* Ms. Dee would like to acknowledge Micki Grant, Lindsay Patterson, Martin Luther King, Ruth and Al Duckett, Yip Harburg, the Farmer's Almanac, Dorothy Parker and The Bible for words that inspired this poem.

\*\*Originally written by Hasna Muhammad.



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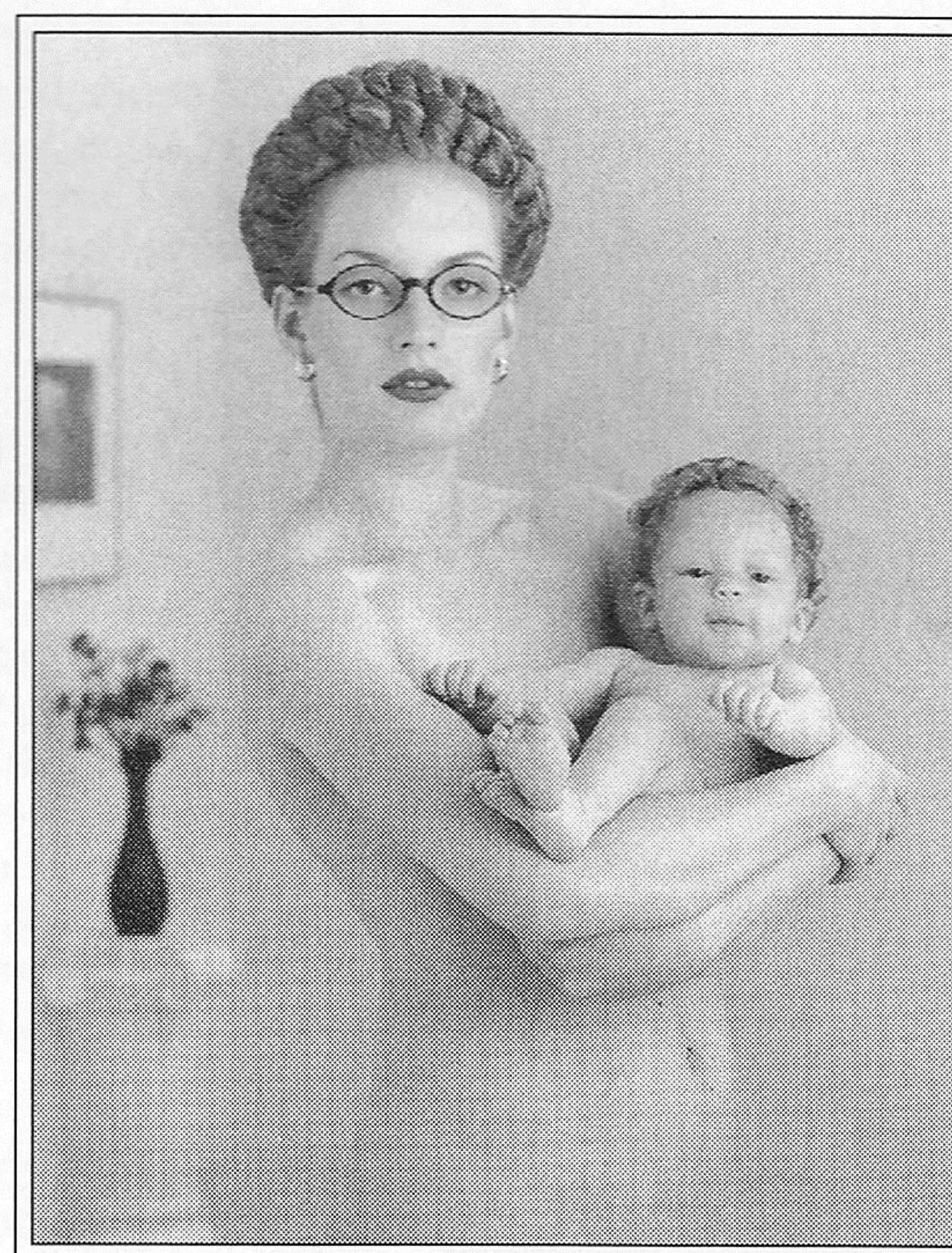
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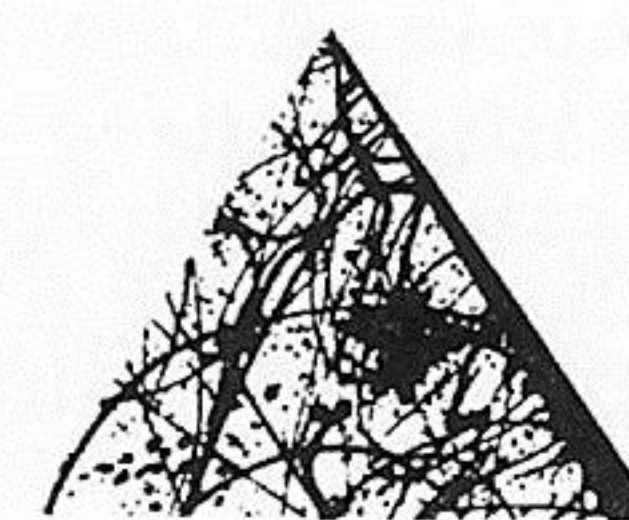
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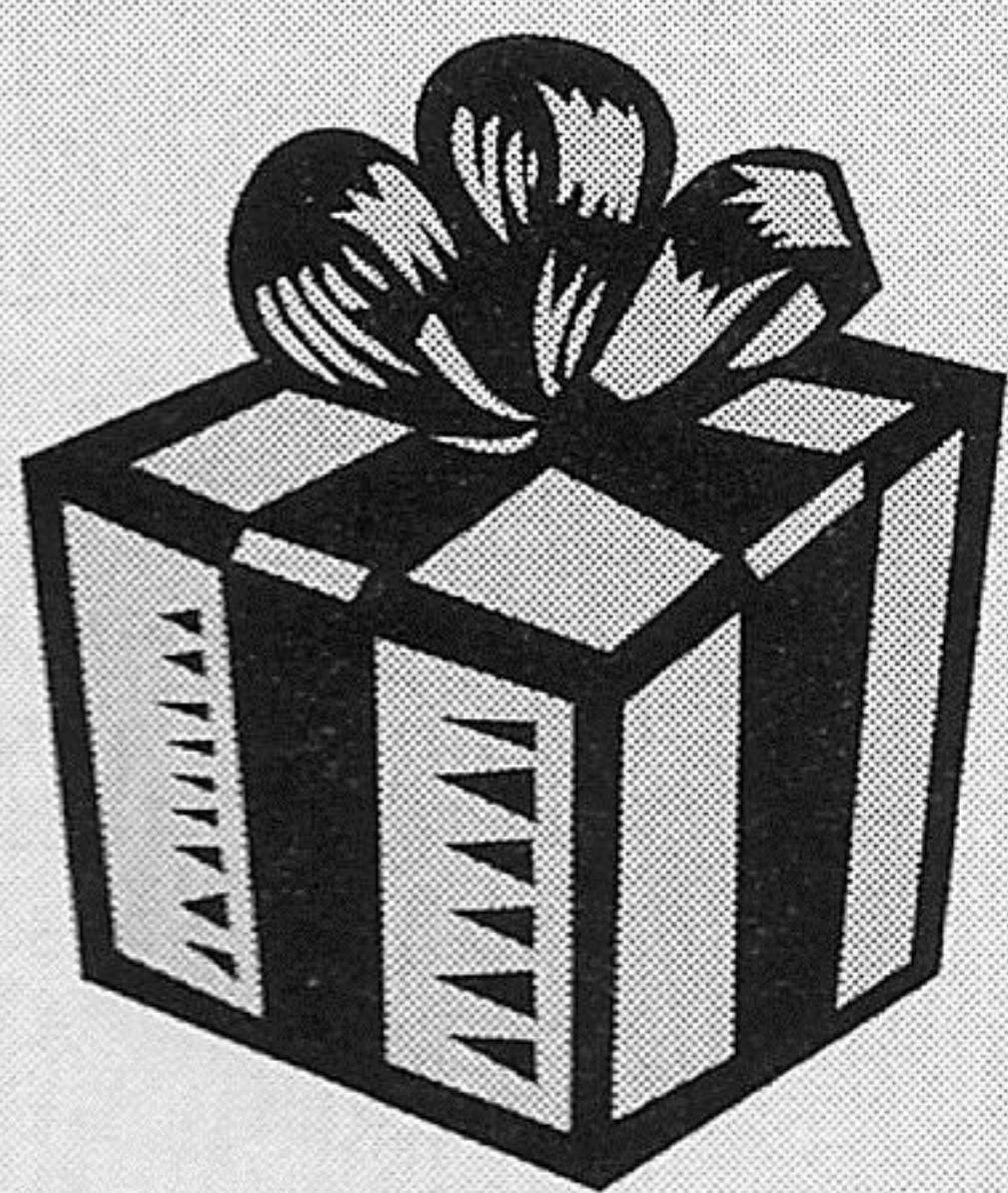
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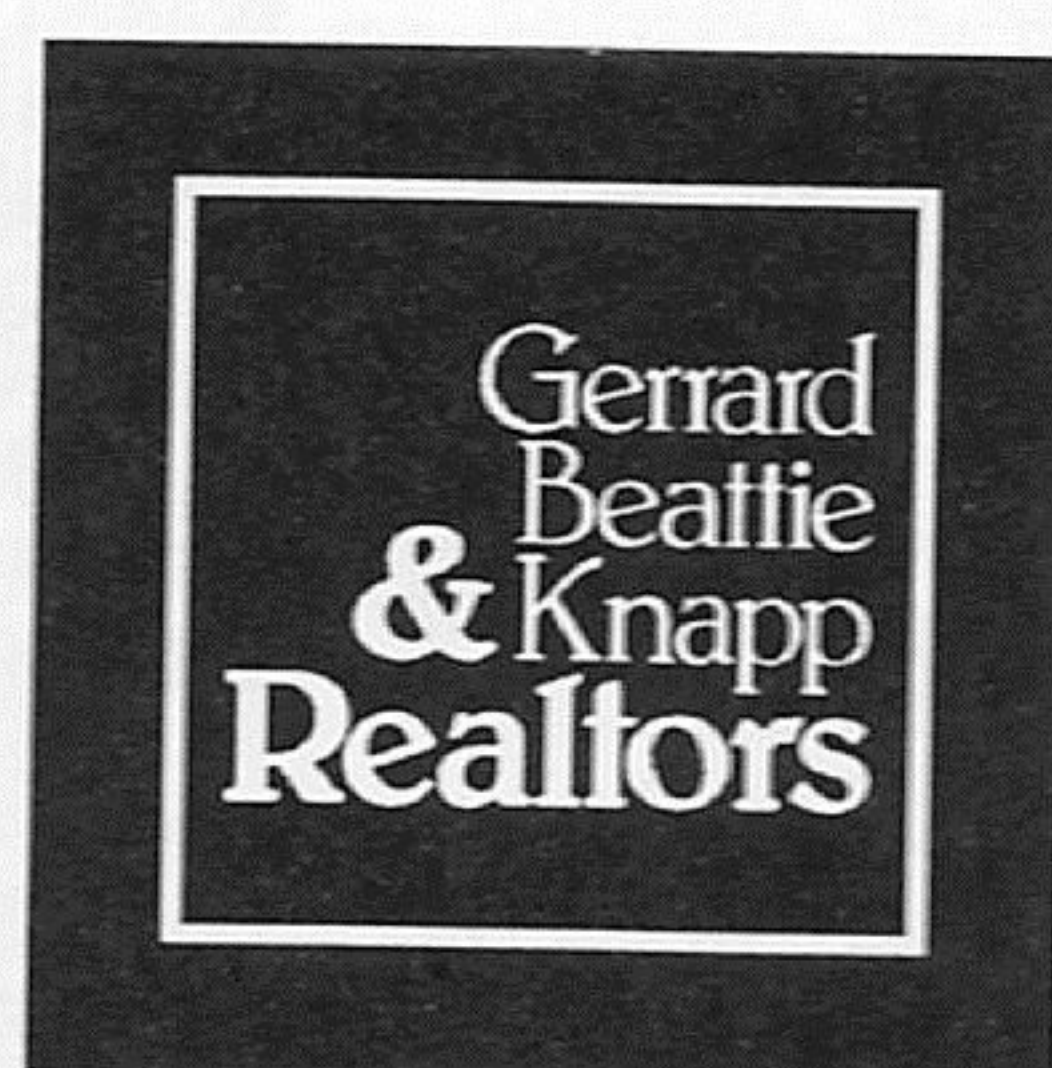
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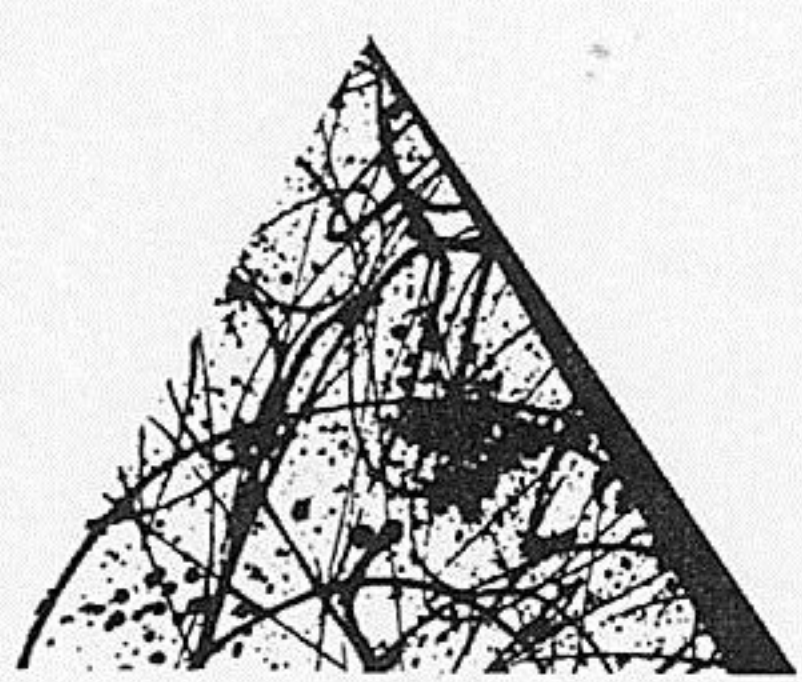


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**\$2,500 - \$4,999**

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#### D.E. "Ned" Skinner Endowment Fund

Established in 1988 in memory of the noted civic leader and arts patron Ned Skinner. Earnings support small and mid-size arts groups.

#### Classic KING-FM Radio

In 1994, Priscilla Bullitt Collins and Harriet Stimson Bullitt gave CCA one-third ownership of Classic KING-FM Radio. CCA distributes its share of dividends to music groups.

#### Guendolen Carkeek Plestcheeff Fund for Decorative and Design Arts

In 1996, CCA was named beneficiary of 25% of the Guendolen Carkeek Plestcheeff estate, valued at about \$2 million. Beginning in 1997, CCA will make grants from this fund in support of programming in the design and decorative arts.

*Another 182 companies supported the King County drive with gifts under \$500 and 148 supported CCA's Pierce County campaign.*



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