

The Inside Story of
Movement Theatre International's
Mime and Clown Festivals

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By

Michael Pedretti

Foreword by Tanya Belov, Fred Curchack,
Avner Eisenberg, Kari Margolis,
and Daniel Stein

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Photograph on cover—Avner Eisenberg as Avner the Eccentric.
Photo courtesy of Avner Eisenberg.

This book is dedicated to the performers, students, scholars,
arts leaders, critics, writers and staff who participated
in making Movement Theatre International what it was.

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FOREWORD



Figure 1 **Fred Curchack.**

Photo Leslie Curchack.

**Fred Curchack,
Theater Artist
Professor of Theater,
The University of Texas at Dallas¹**

I was utterly delighted by *The Inside Story of Movement Theatre International's' Mime and Clown Festivals*. The festivals contributed profoundly to the evolution of an art form. What that “art form” is is not easy to explain, since, as Michael

Pedretti eloquently demonstrates, “movement theater” or whatever one wants to call it, takes myriad forms. This book documents a galaxy of performance that is quite different from the preponderance of contemporary theater; different not only in its virtuosic physicality, but also in its vitality, poetic imagination, psychological depth, political urgency, and outrageous sense of fun.

Mike presented an astounding number of stellar performers from around the globe. I cannot overstate how important his support and encouragement was for me to keep on creating performances over the years. The book reminds me how his festival introduced me to the work of so many great artists who enriched my own work immeasurably. Getting to know some of them personally, due to sharing our work at the festival, has been a great treasure in my life and has even led to precious collaborations. Knowing Mike is also a source of great joy and his producing work has facilitated the creation of many deep artistic friendships.

I love the rich aesthetic insights in the book, and I also find the detailed account of the business/management/producing history to be eye-opening. I was exhausted by contemplating the effort and energy put into creating the MTI festival for so many years. This book should be required reading for any arts management course. Michael Pedretti is a kind of modern-day Pope or Medici, enabling the work of a pantheon of amazing artists.



Figure 2 Avner Eisenberg.
Photo Jon Goell.

**Avner Eisenberg, aka Avner
the Eccentric and
The Jewel of the Nile²**

Mime is the ultimate in simplicity and the purest of art forms. There is no medium or material; just an actor and a bare stage. Mime is the art form underneath all other performing forms.

I have been performing as a clown for almost fifty years, and I still don't have a definition of what a clown is. What clowning definitely is not is a costume and makeup. For me clowning is a verb. It is a

series of attitudes and techniques that lead the performer into a relationship of rapport with the audience. None of the great clowns, Chaplin, Keaton, Lucile Ball, Grock, Groucho, Harpo, to name a few, looks like a traditional clown, but they are clowning all the time. We can say, to paraphrase supreme court justice Potter Stewart, that clowning is like pornography—you can't define it, but you know what it is when you see it. And mime is at the base of it all.

For a long time mime was defined as the illusion mime practiced by Marcel Marceau. In 1971 I went to Paris to study mime at the school of Jacques Lecoq. There I realized the function of mime at the heart of all performing.

On returning to the US in 1974 two events helped to ripen and mature that view in my mind and in the world of theater.

The Festival of American Mime in Milwaukee, in 1978, established that the art form called mime is much more than the illusion pantomime of Marceau and includes a myriad of movement theater styles. On the heels of that Mike Pedretti hosted a series of institutes at Davis & Elkins College, in Elkins, West Virginia. Mike's insight stewarded this broadening of the concept of mime into the much larger world of movement theater. Mike rechristened the institute, Movement Theatre International, and moved it to Philadelphia in 1985 where it was the premier showcase in the US for movement based theater until 1994.



Figure 3 **Kari Margolis.**
Photo Daniel Collins.

Kari Margolis, Founder and Artistic Director of the Adaptors³

Looking back to 1982, after spending seven years studying and performing abroad, Tony Brown and I knew it was time to come home to the States—time to dig deep roots and build a life as theatre-makers. It was scary to start all over as strangers in our own country, especially as artists walking into the unknown territory of creating and producing experimental, physically-based, ensemble theatre.

But we were fortunate. Fortunate because Michael Pedretti had the vision, generosity, know-how, and support of Davis & Elkins College to create the home we were seeking—a gathering place for artists like us to share work and resources. It would be impossible to overstate the positive impact these annual festivals had not only on our careers, but on the shaping of an entire artistic community.

We were young and crazy, and logistics were the last thing on our minds when we let our imaginations take the better of us. So, when we created our first Adaptors' company production AUTOBAHN, we had little thought as to how we would tour or share this work, considering it had fourteen actors, a four-person band, a belly dancer, and a truckload of props, costumes, and multimedia equipment.

But Michael Pedretti was right there ready to take a gamble on us! The madcap sojourn from Brooklyn to Elkins, West Virginia is cemented in our memories as a groundbreaking experience. The recognition we received at the festival gave us the jolt of energy we needed to keep going.

As the Adaptors venture into year thirty-eight, it is without doubt that the tireless efforts of Michael Pedretti and the magic of these annual festivals gave us the inspired and enduring foundation to last a lifetime.



Figure 4 **Tanya Belov.**

Photo Jim R. Moore.

Tanya Belov, Clown, Comedian, Stanislavski System specialist, Director, Professor of acting and directing at UNCSA-School of Drama.⁴

When Yury and I came to America in March 1981, we were unknown to Americans. Our talent and recognition in Russia were of no value in our new country. If we were to continue as performers, we needed an opportunity to show our

work in front of the right audience. We got that opportunity when Mike Pedretti invited us to perform at his International Mime and Movement Festival in Elkins, WV. We immediately became members of the circle of important clowns in America. What Mike did for us and so many other performers was to open the door making success as artists possible. You can have all the talent in the world, until you are seen it means nothing. Mike made us feel welcome in America and especially welcome within the circle of important people in the theater world which allowed Yury and me to continue our work as performers and teachers of clowning. We have performed untold number of shows, created collaborations between America and Russia, and taught acting and clowning at The University of North Carolina School of the Arts.⁵

Not only did Mike help us, he introduced scores of artists from other countries to American audiences including Litsedei from Russia who went on to be featured in *Cirque du Soleil* and Leo Bassi from Italy who went on to win an Obie.

The Inside Story will open the door to readers to discover an amazing collection of gifted performers who were making work that delighted audiences all over America and to a man and an organization that worked so hard with so much love to bring their performances to the public, reviewers, educators and scholars. It was an exciting and influential period of theatrical history, even if not widely known; now brought to you in passionate narration.



Figure 5 **Daniel Stein.**

Photo: Christopher Gibson.

**Daniel Stein, Professional mime
and Senior Lecturer
Univ. of California,
Santa Barbara⁶**

Leonardo Da Vinci wrote “Just as a stone thrown into water becomes the center and cause of various circles....” MTI was that stone for a decade or so and the ripples have been and will continue to emanate far beyond the lives and careers of all the artists it touched. Michael Pedretti

brought together some of the most creative individuals and teams on the planet (from Leningrad to Poughkeepsie, Paris to Elkins, West Virginia and pretty much everywhere in between). We ate, created, performed and taught together every summer to packed houses and full studios. For so many artists it became a dependable yearly source of income that we knew we could count on at an event that was as sophisticated as it was earthy home cooking. Reviewed by journalists from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Village Voice* to the local neighborhood newspaper.

In my career I can't tell you how many people that I have worked for or created with since then have been with people that I was introduced to, or saw their work, or watched them teach a class at Movement Theatre International. Inspiration, education and worldly encounters were the daily fuel that we all ran on. Years and years later I can still trace to MTI individual artists, companies and theaters that are my day to day contacts when casting, interviewing or just getting a valuable piece of information from. It changed mine and so many artists' lives for the better. This book is a deep dive into how a festival ignited an entire genre of theater that has and will continue to nourish audiences and artists across the globe.

Message to the Reader: Most forewords are written by one expert who introduces the reader to the subject, author and book. Because Movement Theatre International engaged so many, it seemed imperative to allow you to hear from several representative artists.



Figure 6 **Leo Bassi**. Photo Jim R. Moore.

PREFACE

An ever-increasing number of independent artists were making and performing theater works that enthralled, enchanted and elated audiences in the latter part of the twentieth century. These inventive artists created, directed and starred in their own shows. Some were called performance artist, others new vaudevillian, mime, clown, movement theater artist, movician, circus artist and a handful of lesser-used labels. Most were solo artists. Nearly all would have been called mimes or clowns in another era. Many denied whatever the press called them for few wanted to be labeled because their work was personal, inimitable and special unto itself. As Søren Kierkegaard purportedly said, “Once you label me, you negate me.”

In 1979 the typical movement theater artist in America toured, lived in a rural area and was experimenting with form. I founded Movement Theatre International (MTI) that year to serve these artists by providing ongoing opportunities for them to overcome both geographic and artistic isolation, mount their works on a professional level, reach a broad public, and pass on their discoveries to the next generation of artists. During the next fifteen years, I had the privilege of producing or presenting over two hundred different performance works by these artists whose visions were as assorted as they were volatile, astute and universal. This book is about them, their work and the venture and adventure of getting their work on stage. MTI’s annual programs fostered the exchange of ideas, form, philosophy and technique, giving the artists a chance to be inspired by the work of their colleagues and peers.

The term “movement theater” came into use when many artists, who would have been called mimes in earlier times, found the word “mime” to be in ill repute. Imitators of some of Marcel Marceau’s easiest techniques (walking in place, pulling a rope, climbing a ladder) were claiming title to the term mime; even though mime had always been the word used to define interactive theatrical performances performed by creator-artists that came from an impulse to move, toured across borders, ignored taboos, laughed at excess and busted boundaries. Asking if we should call these artists “mimes,” “new vaudevillians” or “movement theater artists” begs the question. The question is, “Did the work created and performed during this era delight,

stimulate and nourish audiences in its time, and has it left a legacy for future experiments?" I say, without hesitation, "YES!" The goal of this book is to provide a record of the work of the artists who performed at MTI festivals. While this does not include all the great movement performers of the era, it covers a large and representative share of the best.

INTRODUCTION

ANTIDOTE TO THE AGE OF DETACHMENT

A true theater of joy is non-existent.

—Peter Brook⁷

Man understands that which moves by his ability to “mimic” it; that is, to identify himself with the world by re-enacting it with his entire being.

—Jacques Lecoq⁸

What is TV? The greatest rural kind of touring there is. You can go into someone’s front room anywhere.”

—James Donlon⁹

For theater to fulfill its role in our society and to qualify as an art form, it must nourish the spirit, stimulate the mind and delight the senses. Art of the highest quality always delights the senses. Today, maybe more than ever, we look to the arts to feed our souls. If art doesn’t give us cause to reflect, what purpose does it have? For the theater artist to succeed in two of these three measures is to be deadly. To succeed in just one is to be boring. To fail in all three is unconscionable; in fact, if one fails in all three, one is only *pretending* to make theater, so it is not theater at all.¹⁰

The greatest failure of making theater is to bore the audience, for boring is the antithesis of the creative act. We’ve all seen shows that delight the senses (many circuses, most kicks-and-splits dance troupes) that rile us up with spectacle only to find ourselves either wandering to other places or wishing the show was over after the first fifteen minutes. In other words, just delighting the senses can be boring. Even more often, we have seen the talking-head show that gets us thinking about this or the other thing (many regional theater productions), but in the end we wonder what it was all about, and we leave the theater feeling a little less able to go forward than we were before we entered the theater. Then there is theater that takes us on a spiritual journey but lacks even a modicum of

mental stimuli and often dulls rather than delights our senses. While most boring theater fails to reach a level of adeptness in any of the three indispensable ends, it is possible to reach a high level of success in one of the primary goals and still bore the audience into vacuity.

“Deadly” is more difficult to discern. Peter Brook explains why in *The Empty Space* “If we talk of deadly, let us note that the difference between life and death, so crystal clear in man, is somewhat veiled in other fields. A doctor can tell at once between the trace of life and the useless bag of bones that life has left; but we are less practiced in observing how an idea, an attitude or a form can pass from lively to the moribund.”¹¹ Theater that succeeds in two of the three measures can be successful and even win rave reviews from the most discerning critics. The best regional theater often stimulates the mind and nourishes the soul, but leaves the senses wanting. Some popular Broadway shows delight the senses, sometimes stimulate the mind but feed the soul tripe. “After all, one associates culture with a certain sense of duty, historical costumes and long speeches with the sensation of being bored: so conversely, just the right degree of boringness is a reassuring guarantee of a worthwhile event” (Brook, *The Empty Space*, 11).

The second half of the twentieth century was one of the most impersonal eras in the history of mankind. Television and then the mall replaced the campfire and/or fireplace as the emblem around which families gathered. Celluloid figures on two-dimensional screens edged out live sweating actors. Vinyl and then plastic CD’s substituted for live music performances and mega-scream fetes dominated the live performances. Celebrities replaced presidents as the most influential icons in America. Politicians distanced themselves from the public and created “sound bites” to replace debates and public speeches. It was The Age of Detachment.

This cultural void set the stage for the most important movement in theater in the fourth quarter of the twentieth century—the work of original actor-artists who sought and reclaimed direct personal connection by smashing boundaries. It took form in the Living Theater, the Open Theater, performance art and, in its purest form, in mime and clown-theater. Many creative artists of this era found their way to clowning and making mime—two of the oldest forms of public performance. In this

book you will meet many of the artists who made a “true theater of joy” during this disengaged era.

Mimes and clowns have always been originating artists (i.e., the performer makes his/her own work). Mimes and clowns have always placed high priority on social relevance (stimulate the mind), slapstick, movement, image (delight the senses) and the disenfranchising of archetypal fears and taboos (nourish the soul). Mimes and clowns have historically been interested in give-and-take one-on-one communication with their audience. They rarely distance themselves behind a proscenium arch and ask the audience to be polite and respectful. “Livelier, faster, brighter” (Brook, *The Empty Space*, 11) are their keywords.

As with so many of these movement artists, my interest in ritual theater grew out of dissatisfaction with the commercial theater, then with the

“Rhythm in mime is the exception, while in dance it is the rule. Rhythm might be imposed on a work of mime in order to unify it but the work itself is based on surprise, dramatic hesitation—the mime must be born and grow slowly.... The typical figure of mime is struggling and earthbound.”

—Etienne Decroux, quoted by Anna Kisselgoff, *The New York Times*, January 1, 1984, H12.

regional theater and ultimately with the Living Theater progeny. While I continued to work in the spoken word theater, my own directing focused on movement, improvisation and sound. The most moving show I ever directed was a production of the Open Theater’s *The Serpent*. I withheld the script from the actors until more than three-

fourths of the way through the rehearsal process. One of the scenes in the play has Cain commit the first murder. Actors were asked to find a way from within their memories to understand and act out how Cain killed Abel when Cain knew neither killing nor death. The actors came to realize that Cain could not have possibly known he wanted to kill Abel, nor that he even wanted Abel to die, for Cain did not and could not have known what death or killing were. These were concepts not possible for Cain or anyone else until death of a human was known and murder invented. Over and over the actors were asked to approach the killing from a fresh start until the ignorance of the consequences of Cain’s action became part of their own reality. Since Cain did not desire Abel’s death, what did he want? What was he seeking? How did he go about trying to enforce his

will in a way that led to the discovery of both death and killing? Only after we solved that problem did the actors receive the script and did we begin “rehearsal” in a more traditional sense of the word. The payoff came when audiences suspended breath at the moment Cain tried to squeeze love out of Abel (only to squeeze breath out of him); and when audiences left the theater in profound silence.

Directing *The Serpent* made me even more fervent in my search for work that could transform an audience. I sought more opportunities to see new work that confirmed theater as art was possible. Time and time again, I was let down and disappointed. Then in 1974, at the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) convention held in Lexington, Kentucky I saw a young mime company performing what I thought was extraordinary work, but performed poorly. I concluded these performers must have studied with a brilliant teacher, for they were exploring a style of theater that they had not yet made their own; they could only have borrowed the style and method from another. I asked them with whom they studied. With pride, they said Tony Montanaro. I concluded that I should find the opportunity to study with Mr. Montanaro. I

“The theater department at Davis & Elkins College has emerged in the past decade as one of the leading drama schools in the country.”

—Jack Waugh, “West Virginia Town Serves as Mecca of Mime this Summer,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 1, 1982, B 11.

had no interest in becoming a mime or, for that matter, in performing on any level. My interest in theater, from the beginning, was as creator and director. I thought at the time that Montanaro could provide me with insight in my search to make performances that moved audiences more than they impressed them.

In January 1977, I headed to South Paris, Maine with about two dozen college students from Davis & Elkins College (Elkins, West Virginia) to meet and study with Montanaro. The three-week workshop was a mixture of fundamentals and technique. The techniques were fascinating to a mime neophyte and the fundamentals were every bit as insightful as I suspected they would be. Montanaro reawakened my interest in mime, but it was not until I saw Ronlin Foreman’s production of “Happy Fellow” that I would become a disciple.

It was at another SETC annual convention that I first saw Foreman's work. An irritating sound off-stage grabbed the attention of a thousand people packed into a small theater, and Foreman's energy never let up for a minute as his clown, Baa, unleashed a long-lost strain in each of us. Foreman demonstrated that there could be a performance as strong, vivid and immediate as I dreamed was possible. I had seen theater as strong and as vivid, but never as immediate. Foreman was communicating directly to my nerve cells. No need to route his images through my eyes, translate them in my head, seep them into my heart and carry them to the ends of my senses. Even when that process took microseconds, as it did in the Milwaukee Repertory's production of *Marat Sade*; it wasn't the same as the actor-to-nerve-endings sensation that Foreman elicited that day.

In the early 1970s, I heard a speech by Gene Frankel in which he referred to Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* and said most shows were deadly. In fact, he said a truly brilliant show is such a rarity that most people never see one and, therefore, do not know what theater might be. He paused and said, "Any of us would be lucky if we saw ten great shows in our lives." I had recently read *The Empty Space* and Frankel's challenge gave me pause. That night as I fell asleep, I relived the shows I had seen—from high school productions to the Guthrie Theater's famous production of *The Cherry Orchard*—and concluded only two shows ranked as brilliant; namely, the Milwaukee Repertory's productions of *Waiting for Godot* and *Marat Sade*.¹² Thanks to my work as Artistic Director of Movement Theatre International, I have since had the privilege of seeing thirty (twenty-two mime/clown) transformational performances.

Foreman was part of both a long tradition and a revival of one of the great art forms of all time. At the time Montanaro and Foreman reintroduced me to mime, a resurgence of mime was taking place in Europe and America. Inspired and often led by people such as Etienne Decroux, Jacques Lecoq, Lotte Goslar, Carlo Mazzone-Clementi, Dimitri and Marcel Marceau,¹³ performing artists were both trying and succeeding to find ways to connect to an audience in a personal, direct, explicit, blunt way that was the antithesis of the impersonal entertainment of television, movies and much of traditional theater seen in the repertory companies in Europe and the regional theaters in America.

The mime and clown was the antidote to The Age of Detachment, for she or he demanded one-on-one communication with the audience. You could not distance yourself from the performer. Andre Gregory (*My Dinner with Andre*), serving on a planning committee for MTI's 1988 festival, looked at fellow panelist Avner the Eccentric and said, "I love your work. It's so human. When I saw your show, I felt I was making contact with another human. You reminded me that it's wonderful to be an individual. Everyone and everything else in our society treats me impersonally. I was proud to be a human being during your show."

The proscenium arch, sometimes referred to as the fourth wall, often reinforces the gulf between performer and actor. Artists interested in creating an intimate relationship with the audience try to "tear down the wall." Mimes, through need, design or chance, did not so much tear down the fourth wall of theater as ignore it. It was as if they did not know it existed. Maybe they had the luck of performing so many street shows that they never succeeded in believing there was a chasm to be closed between them and the audience. Maybe their experiments in street entertainment were rewarded by an audience hungry for human contact that urged the artists to push farther in their fledgling attempts to reach out—thereby urging the performers to stretch farther into themselves to discover and expose their vulnerability in ways that are inherent in the mime-clown form. Maybe they were such "human" persons themselves that they were attracted to the most personal of all art forms. Maybe the genius of Etienne Decroux, the father of modern mime, (who himself left politics and then the theater in search of a more personal art) was so strong that his influence provided the inspiration necessary to break down form in favor of direct communication. Probably it was a confluence of all the above, plus a wide range of influences that I have overlooked, that created the substratum that served as a springboard for one of the most creative eras in the history of mime and clowning (1971-1997).

There were several defining moments in preparation for the era: Decroux's school Ecole de Mime de Etienne Decroux de New York and his performance at Carnegie Hall, his studio in Boulogne-Billancourt, Lecoq's L'École Internationale de Théâtre in Paris, and the first contemporary mime festival in Europe in 1971, to name a few. In America, the International Mime Institute and Festival (directed by Louis

Campbell with Bari Rolfe serving as Program Co-coordinator and held at Viterbo College in La Crosse, Wisconsin from July 20 to August 10, 1974) provided a place for emerging American artists to learn the art and craft. Artists enjoyed a place to converge, see each other's work, discourse into the wee hours of the night, explore new tools to bridge the chasm between performer, art form and audience, and to dream of new performances to be made and new forms to be invented.

Even more influential than the International Mime Institute and Festival was Valley Studio, founded by E. Reid Gilbert in Spring Green, Wisconsin in 1969. It was a summer institute, and Reid hired some of the country's best mime and clown professionals to teach novices and entry-level artists. Valley Studio also housed two mime companies and the national association for mimes.

I had the good fortune to study at Valley Studio before it closed. There I studied with Tom Leabhart, E. Reid Gilbert and Marjorie Barstow. It was my first introduction to the brilliant technique of Decroux, expertly taught by Tom Leabhart. We learned to rotate, incline and tilt the head, neck, chest, waist and pelvis. An amazing number of geometric shapes can be made with the body by rearranging these positions. We learned and practiced Decroux's scale of movement; we sought and found "zero"—a state of balance with no movement, thought or emotion.

"The movement arts incorporate the grace of dance and the drama of the theater to tell stories about the human condition."

—Mike Pedretti, quoted in the *Record-Delta*, WV, June 20, 1984.

I saw a performance by Leabhart's company that was precise, disciplined, sculpted with animation, energetic—and detached, neutral, and inaccessible. On the same bill, John Towsen delighted the audience with histrionic tumbling that lacked theme or story, was rough around the edges, but was rich in understanding of the human challenge and pushed to the edge the idea of intimate—a prototype for rough and immediate theater. I found out later that Leabhart was doing his own experimenting with performance and was creating *How I was Perplexed and What I did About It*, which became one of the definitive works of "new mime."

Studying at Valley Studio in the summer of 1978 reminded me that I had been introduced to mime-theater while doing research in graduate

school on physical theater (in this case, the study of the physical locations of performances—not the study of the body in movement). By the luck of the draw, I was assigned to present papers on the Phlyakes, English pantomime houses and Moliere—including the influence *commedia dell'arte* had on his theater. Since I was relatively ignorant about the rich history of mime and clowning at the time, I did not realize I had researched three of the great eras of mime.

In August 1978, the Festival of American Mime (FOAM) played in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but previous family commitments kept me away. The festival is most remembered as the place a tall lanky Milwaukee native returned from years of study in Paris with a show called *Timepiece*—one of the first works by a Decroux disciple to edge past the esoteric into the theatrical. Daniel Stein's *Timepiece*, with Pachelbel's *Canon* as background music, creates image after image that connects directly with archetypal impulses deep in our memories. No longer are we scrutinizing in awe an exhibit of Decroux technique performed with astonishing precision. The vocabulary was used to decipher age-old controls and perceptions of time on our day-to-day existence. When I saw this work a year later at the Syracuse Mime Festival, I wanted the audience to hold their applause for two or three minutes so the swell of ideas, emotions, and truths floated into the theater by Stein could have the opportunity to penetrate completely. Needless to say, the audience did not. I was compelled to leave the theater as fast as possible to find the peace of the city street to allow the work to conclude. While I recognize the vital role of instantaneous applause at the completion of a performance, on rare occasions when shows touch deeply to the visceral (e.g. *Timepiece*, Tmu Na's *5 Screams*, and Maureen Fleming's *Water on the Moon*), a silent moment or two followed by growing thunderous applause would allow the work to steep.

I have been discussing the role of the artists in creating a theatrical event that is not deadly. But an equal partner in any live theater event is the audience. The Natya Shastra, the fifth Veda of Hinduism, talks at length about the reaction and responsibility of audiences. An audience member can be neither sentimental nor cynical, but must be sensitive. The cynic is too hardened to respond to what is on stage. The sentimentalist responds too easily, thereby neither demanding enough of the performer

or themselves. The sensitive viewer resists responding until a welling of emotion builds up and explodes into a higher state of being. The ultimate response leads one to a state of *rasa*, an old term used in India to describe the impact of theater on the audience. The goal of a performance is to create an emotional response in the audience, and when that response is so strong that it causes the audience to float half-way to Nirvana, the audience experiences the state of *rasa*. If our spirits are not suspended above earth during a theatrical performance, the experience is mundane, and we would have done as well or better to have stayed at home. Another way to define deadly theater is a performance that fails to produce a state of *rasa* in sensitive audience members.

The performers must set the stage for audiences to experience *rasa*. Ultimately, reaching *rasa* is the responsibility of each audience member, but without the proper stimuli of color, shape, movement, and sound leading to an emotional state (*bhava*) experienced and projected by the performers, it is not possible to experience *rasa*. To experience *rasa* is a supreme act and worth going to hundreds of performances to be able to experience once in a lifetime. If we should be as lucky as Frankel suggested, we might experience *rasa* ten times.

As I walked the streets of Syracuse, I realized this was the fourth time in my life I experienced *rasa*. Stein's performance of *Timepiece* convinced me I wanted to see more originating artist's stage shows and when possible bring that work to Elkins, WV where I was Director of the Theatre Arts Program.



Figure 7 **Boiler House Theatre**, Davis & Elkins College, home of the International Mime and Clown Festivals, 1980-85. Photo courtesy of D&E College.

In 1974 I accepted a position as Director of Theater at Davis & Elkins College in Elkins, West Virginia. I was able to convince the architect—who had already submitted a design to turn the abandoned boiler house building into a tiny proscenium theater without theatrical lighting—into designing a 200+ seating flexible staging theater with a state-of-the-art lighting system.



Figure 8 The inside of the **Boiler House Theatre**. Photo courtesy of D&E College.



Figure 9 E. Reid Gilbert teaching Illusion Pantomime class how to pull a mime rope. Photo Norton Gusky CC BY 4.0.



Figure 10 Gilbert and mask class. Photo by Norton Gusky CC BY 4.0, 1981.