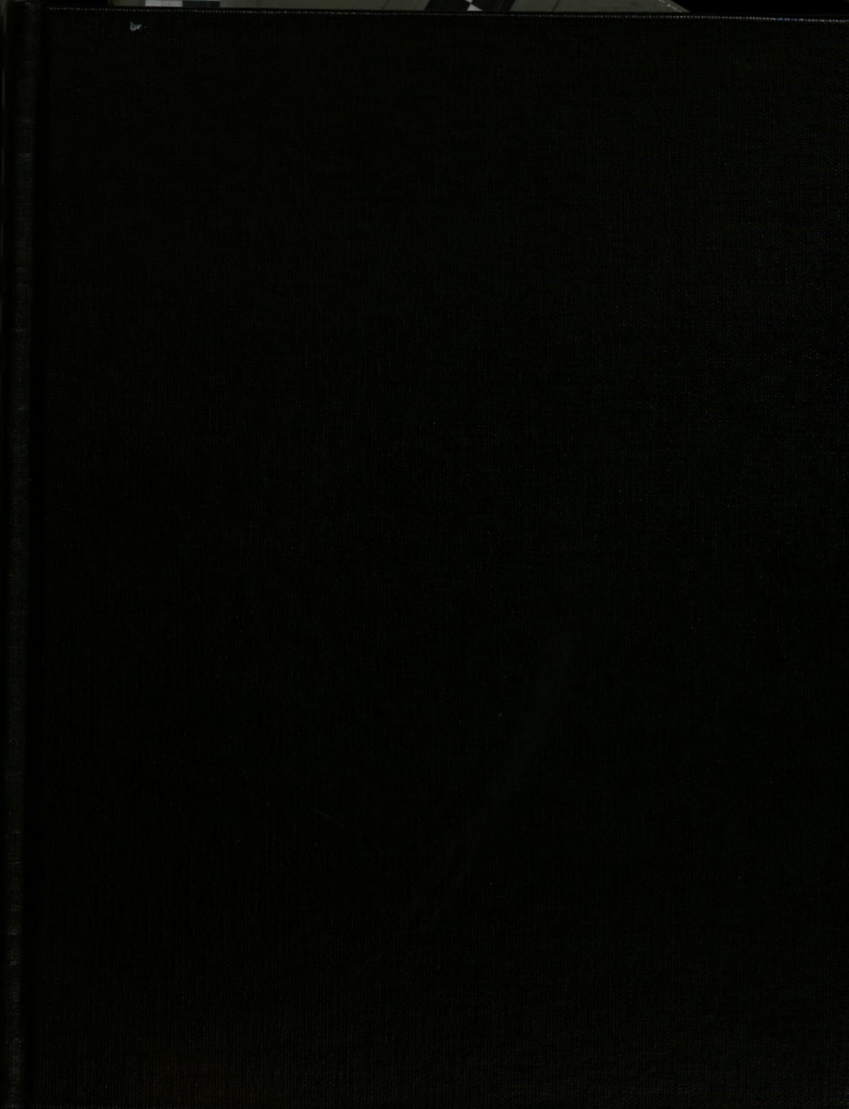




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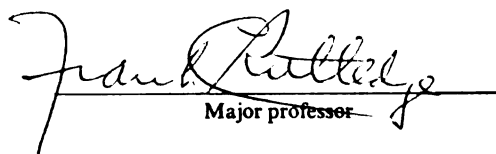
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THE YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE, 1963-1968

VOLUME I

By

Laura C. Bird

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to

Michigan State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

THE YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE, 1963-1968

By

Laura C. Bird

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre (YGT) was a truly remarkable achievement by any standards. A unique undertaking, the festival was dedicated to the professional performance of a repertory of classical Greek theatre in the English language. Aristophanes' *The Birds* played in repertory with the Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in the 1966 inaugural season. YGT was an ambitious effort to establish a major theatre festival in the state of Michigan. It gathered performers of the highest caliber to Ypsilanti and they garnered international critical acclaim. The company included Dame Judith Anderson, Ruby Dee, Donald Davis, Jacqueline Brookes, and Bert Lahr. Alexis Solomos, former director of the Greek National Theatre, was imported to serve as artistic director.

The circumstances surrounding YGT's achievement make it even more remarkable. The organizers were strictly amateurs with little or no experience with the theatre or with fundraising. Ypsilanti was a small, economically depressed Midwestern community. No one in America had ever attempted a theatre festival dedicated to classical Greek theatre before. The amazing successes of that summer of 1966 carried with them the seeds of the project's failure. YGT was never able to mount a second season. The purpose of this study is to document the history of the YGT from its early planning stages in 1963 through 1968, the year the fruitless efforts to duplicate the triumphs of 1966 were finally abandoned. It will also look for the causes of YGT's

extraordinary success and ultimate failure and analyze their implications.

The structure of the study is essentially chronological. An historical sketch of the community that gave YGT birth and an overview of the theatrical situation of the early 1960s will provide a frame of reference. In addition, a comparison of the YGT experience with other theatre festivals will provide a further context for evaluating YGT.

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INTRODUCTION

A college baseball stadium is altered to resemble a Hellenistic Greek theatre. The three-and-a-half story *skene* stretches from first base to third. In front of the *skene*, a long narrow platform serves as the *proskenium*. Steps descend to the *orquestra*. Massive post and lintel arches reminiscent of the *parodoi* at the theatre of Epidauros flank the forty-two foot diameter dancing circle. Hidden in each of the dugouts musicians and light board operators await their cues as an actor appears on the *skene*'s roof. Back lit by an orange red setting sun, the Watchman delivers the opening lament of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. International attention is focused on the small city of Ypsilanti, Michigan, home of the first professional production of the *Oresteia* in the United States. It is the summer of 1966 and this is the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Festival in its first and final season.

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre (YGT) was a truly remarkable achievement by any standards. A unique undertaking, the festival was dedicated to the professional performance of a repertory of classical Greek theatre in the English language. Aristophanes' *The Birds* played in repertory with the *Oresteia* that inaugural season. YGT was an ambitious effort to establish a major theatre festival in the state of Michigan. It gathered performers of the highest caliber to that radically altered baseball stadium and they garnered international critical acclaim. The company included Dame Judith Anderson, Ruby Dee, Donald Davis, Jacqueline Brookes, and Bert Lahr. Alexis Solomos, former director of the Greek National Theatre, was imported to serve as artistic director.

The circumstances surrounding YGT's achievement make it even more remarkable. The organizers were strictly amateurs with little or no experience with the theatre or with fundraising. Ypsilanti was a small, economically depressed Midwestern community. No one in America had ever attempted a theatre festival dedicated to classical Greek theatre before. The amazing successes of that summer of 1966 carried with them the seeds of the project's failure. The purpose of this study is to document the history of the YGT from its early planning stages in 1963 through 1968, the year the fruitless efforts to duplicate the triumphs of 1966 were finally abandoned. It will also look for the causes of YGT's extraordinary success and ultimate failure and analyze their implications.

A context must be provided for the study by a brief examination of the milieu surrounding the creation of YGT. A sketch of the community that gave it birth and an overview of the theatrical situation of the early 1960s will provide a frame of reference. In addition, a comparison of the YGT experience with other theatre festivals will provide a further context for evaluating YGT. Special emphasis will be placed on the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival for several reasons. Early organizers of the YGT used Stratford as a model. They invited its originator, Tom Patterson, to serve as Executive Director for a brief time. Interviewees frequently compare YGT to Stratford and a formal comparison of the two festivals, one successful, the other not, does provide some interesting insights.

There are four major types of sources for this study. Various collections of papers and other materials related to YGT offer a significant amount of information through: official minutes and reports of the Greek Theatre board of directors, private and official

correspondence, feasibility studies, financial statements, inventories, budgets, programs, publicity brochures, press releases, photographs, newspaper clippings, architectural drawings, and other miscellaneous items. Newspapers and periodicals provide numerous reviews, feature stories, and editorials. Over a dozen interviews fill in gaps in the written record and flesh out the picture of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Interviewees were connected to YGT in various ways including: principal actors and chorus members, technicians and board members, consultants and contractors, and proponents and opponents of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Finally, secondary sources such as books, memoirs, dissertations, and master's theses are used for the comparison of other festivals with YGT. An examination of primary sources on festivals other than YGT is beyond the scope of this study.

The structure of the study is essentially chronological. Chapter One describes the community and the theatrical situation that confronted planners of the YGT; introduces the early organizers; and explores their motivations and their first efforts to create a professional Greek Theatre Festival in Ypsilanti through 1963. Chapter Two documents 1964 through 1965. It describes fundraising activities and planning for the 1966 season including the hiring of talent and various plans for the physical plant of the theatre. The next two chapters chronicle the season itself including the construction, rehearsal, promotion, and production phases. Chapter Four also summarizes the critical reception of the *Oresteia* and *The Birds*. Chapter Five depicts the aftermath of the 1966 season and the financial crises that faced theatre officials as they struggled to continue the festival. The sixth chapter is a comparative analysis of eleven different North American theatre festivals with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Festival. The final chapter provides a

summation of the study and its implications. It postulates the causes of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre's financial failure in the midst of its artistic success and analyzes YGT's impact on Michigan and American theatre.

CHAPTER ONE

YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE BEGINNINGS

“CLARA’S BABY”

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was conceived in 1963, born in 1966, took to its sick bed in 1967, and was declared dead by 1968. The struggle to create a viable theatre festival in this small Midwestern city took place in the midst of turbulent times. In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested by police as he led a column of hymn-singing protesters down Birmingham, Alabama streets. Americans fought in the jungles of Vietnam and Clark Kerr, President of the University of California, warned a Harvard audience that university students had “revolt on their minds.”¹ President John F. Kennedy had less than a year to live.

Kennedy’s brief Presidency brought a renewed interest in the arts in America. White House galas featured artists of the highest caliber in literature, music, dance, and theatre. Poet Robert Frost was invited to attend the Kennedy inaugural. Igor Stravinsky was guest of honor at a party to celebrate his eightieth birthday. The East Room of the White House was made vibrant with string quartets, ballet companies, and Shakespearean actors. Pablo Casals, Isaac Stern, and many others performed for the first couple. “‘Command performances at the White House,’ noted a *New York Times* reporter, ‘have become almost as sought after as postmasterships.’”²

¹ Milton Viorst, *Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 277.

² Ezra Brown, ed., *This Fabulous Century: 1960-1970*, vol. 7 (New York: Time-Life,

In this climate, it was possible to hope for some significant federal support of the American theatre. The bitter and controversial defeat of the Federal Theatre Project, in 1939, had made subsequent efforts to gain government aid for the theatre extremely difficult. This stalemate lasted throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Important changes in the public debate over arts funding led to the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965. These changes included a new educational and scholarly emphasis by association with the National Endowment for the Humanities, an appeal to every Congressman's constituency through the creation of state arts councils, and a significant shift in public opinion brought on by President Kennedy's patronage of the arts.³

If government support for theatre was on the horizon in 1963, foundation support was already a reality. In 1959, the Ford Foundation made a number of sizable grants to small theatre companies that were beginning to establish themselves. These grants provided a modicum of financial stability to such groups as the Alley Theatre in Houston, the Arena Stage in Washington D.C., and The Actor's Workshop in San Francisco.⁴ Other foundations eventually followed the lead of Ford and this support was a significant factor in the tremendous growth of regional theatres in the 1960s.

Theatre critic Emory Lewis described Broadway in the 1960s as "a dull, creaking entertainment factory, selling hastily made, shoddy and over-priced goods . . . a factory especially designed for the expense-account trade, the out-of-town buyer, the client, the huckster, and the outrageously important theatre-party ladies."⁵ Lewis' assessment may

1970) 34-39.

³ Gary O. Larson, *The Reluctant Patron: The United States Government and the Arts 1943-1965* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

⁴ Oscar G. Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), 525.

⁵ Emory Lewis, *Stages: The Fifty Year Childhood of the American Theatre* (Englewood

have been harsh, but it is true that the 1960s were not a time of peak creativity on Broadway. The number of new productions declined steadily throughout the decade, falling from approximately sixty in 1960 to only thirty-eight new productions in 1970.⁶

The creative stagnation of Broadway had been somewhat relieved by the emergence of off-Broadway in the late 1940s and the 1950s with companies such as the Circle in the Square and the Phoenix Theatre. However, costs of productions off-Broadway rose dramatically in the 1960s, causing many off-Broadway houses to alter play selection and ticket-pricing strategies. The differences between Broadway and off-Broadway blurred somewhat and the role of leading-edge creativity in the New York theatre scene shifted to off-off-Broadway groups such as the LaMama Experimental Theatre Club, the American Place Theatre, and the Judson Poets' Theatre.⁷

Dissatisfaction with Broadway fare gave added impetus to the decentralization of the American theatre. When the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre (YGT) opened in 1966, there were more professional actors working in the regional theatres than in New York City for the first time in the twentieth century.⁸ Interest in decentralization had been around for some time. In 1935, the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA) was chartered by Congress to stimulate the growth of theatre outside New York and to form an academy for the training of personnel. Under-funded, ANTA did not fulfill its potential. However, by the 1960s, it had become the principal coordinating center for regional professional, amateur, academic, and civic theatre groups. ANTA collected and

Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 91.

⁶ Oscar G. Brockett and Robert Findlay, *Century of Innovation*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 372.

⁷ Ibid, 374-6.

⁸ Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 526.

exchanged information and provided consulting services for its various constituencies.⁹

The YGT took advantage of ANTA's services during the Festival's formative years.

By 1961, there were a sufficient number of professional regional theatres in existence to justify the creation of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG). This organization was formed to foster cooperation and communication between professional not-for-profit theatre companies.¹⁰

The growth of university theatre programs also contributed to the decentralization of American theatre. The Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie-Mellon University) instituted the first degree in theatre in 1914. By 1966, there were scores of colleges and universities offering various degrees in theatre. In 1955, a theatre major at Michigan State Normal College (located in Ypsilanti and later renamed Eastern Michigan University) was established and the neighboring University of Michigan's program had grown significantly since its modest beginnings in 1916.¹¹

By the 1960s, university theatre programs were exploring the benefits of collaboration with professional groups. Yale, Princeton, Brandeis, and Dartmouth all had relationships with professional companies at that time. In 1961, the University of Michigan established their Professional Theatre Program. This program's primary goal was to bring quality professional theatre to the community, but it was also linked to the university's educational theatre program. The Professional Theatre Program at the University of Michigan eventually led to an affiliation between the university and the

⁹ Arthur Lithgow, "The Professional Theater and the Universities," in *The American Theater Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1967) 174.

¹⁰ Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 520.

¹¹ Ferol Brinkman, ed., *University of Michigan Encyclopedic Survey: 1940-75*, vol. 6 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1975) 223.

Association of Producing Arts (APA).¹²

Formed by Ellis Raab in 1960, the APA was a repertory company well known for the quality of its actors and its wide-ranging play selection. Performers such as Helen Hayes, Rosemary Harris, Will Geer, and Jacqueline Brooks (who was also a member of the YGT company) were featured in works by Chekhov, Eliot, Ibsen, Ionesco, Shaw, Shakespeare, and others.¹³ A one-year association with Princeton University followed the APA's initial season in Bermuda. Next, the company found a home in the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre at University of Michigan for the 1961-2 season. They stayed for three years before joining up with a dormant Phoenix Theatre management to reincarnate themselves as the APA-Phoenix. In 1965, the APA-Phoenix abandoned its off-Broadway house and moved to Broadway, while at the same time continuing to maintain a relationship with the University of Michigan.¹⁴ In this particular instance, regional, educational, off-Broadway, and Broadway theatre all came together in a single organization. However, as grants expired and successful actors moved on, the APA-Phoenix could not sustain itself. By 1970, it had died, never to rise again.¹⁵

A growing number of theatre festivals also helped to diversify the American theatre scene in the 1960s. Most were dedicated to the performance of Shakespeare. Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival had been giving free performances in Central Park since 1957 and, in 1962, the city-owned Delacorte Theatre was built for the use of the Festival. The American Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Connecticut had been in operation since 1955. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Utah Shakespearean

¹² Ibid, 224.

¹³ Brockett and Findley, *Century of Innovation*, 373.

¹⁴ Lithgow, "Professional Theater," 173.

¹⁵ Brockett and Findley, *Century of Innovation*, 373.

Festival, and San Diego's National Shakespeare Festival were the American West's contribution to the festival scene.¹⁶

Two Canadian ventures were also an important part of the festival movement. The Shaw Festival opened in Niagara-on-the-Lake, just across the border from New York State. The festival began modestly. For the short inaugural season of 1962, Maynard Burgess directed ten unpaid actors in weekend performances of *Don Juan in Hell* and *Candida*.¹⁷ The festival performed works by Shaw exclusively during its first several years, but the company later expanded its repertoire to include other playwrights whose plays were written during Shaw's exceptionally long lifetime.

The Stratford Shakespeare Festival of Ontario, Canada is one of the oldest of the festivals mentioned here and the one that had the most influence on the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. In the spring of 1963, Stratford was preparing its tenth season as organizers in Ypsilanti began exploring the possibility of their first. The Stratford Festival was the idea of a persistent and persuasive local citizen, Tom Patterson. Patterson saw the festival as a chance to revitalize his community and bring needed tourist dollars into town. Stratford was a small city with a failing industrial base.¹⁸ The only real connection the city had with Shakespearean performance was its name. It had no professional companies or adequate theatrical facilities before 1953. A committee of local women and businessmen formed to explore the idea. Later, they would form the nucleus of the

¹⁶ Glenn Loney, *Twentieth Century Theatre*, vol. 2 (New York: Facts on File, 1983), 320-384.

¹⁷ Ibid, 335.

¹⁸ John Pettigrew and Jamie Portman, *Stratford: The First Thirty Years*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1985) 20.

Festival's Board of Governors.¹⁹

From the beginning, Tom Patterson was determined to produce a top quality product. He secured the services of Briton, Tyrone Guthrie, as artistic director for the festival. Guthrie had left his job at London's Old Vic and was keenly interested in producing Shakespeare on an open stage. One of the chief appeals of the Stratford project was that he could have control over the shape of the performance space.²⁰ Designer, Tanya Moiseiwitsch, devised a flexible multilevel space and over this, the Festival organizers erected a gigantic tent.

Guthrie encouraged Patterson to import a few key people from England, including Moiseiwitsch, Alec Guinness, and American-born Irene Worth, and then he filled out the rest of the company with Canadian talent. A comedy and tragedy were chosen (*All's Well That Ends Well* and *Richard III*) and performed in repertory. Reviews were mostly positive; the thrust staging excited a great many reviewers. Ticket sales were phenomenal. Attendance for the six-week season averaged an amazing ninety-eight percent of capacity.²¹

By 1963, the Stratford Festival was a firmly established and much emulated institution. That year, Clara Godwin Owens, aware of what Shakespeare had done for Stratford, Ontario, wondered what classical Greek theatre could do for her hometown of Ypsilanti, Michigan. The city was named in honor of General Demetrius Ypsilanti, a hero of the Greek War of Independence from Turkey (1821-9).

The General had held the city of Argos for 3 days, with a command of only 300

¹⁹ Ibid, 27.

²⁰ Tyrone Guthrie and Robertson Davies, *Renown At Stratford: A Record of the Shakespeare Festival in Canada, 1953* (Toronto: Clarke, 1953) 6.

²¹ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 11.

men against a force of approximately 30,000 Turks, eventually escaping behind enemy lines without the loss of a single man. Not long after this, the little Michigan village of Woodruff's Grove expanded across the Huron River. America's own revolution was not yet fifty years old. The country's sympathy with the Greek cause was strong and the name of Ypsilanti was chosen for the new town.²² This and a number of elegant homes in the Greek revival style of architecture were Ypsilanti's only connections with classical Greek theatre in 1963.

In 1963, Ypsilanti had a population of approximately 24,000. When Ypsilanti Township, which surrounds the city to the north, south, and east, was included, the area population was approximately 55,000. Education was and is one of the major industries. Cleary College was one of Michigan's largest business schools, with 1,500 students enrolled. Eastern Michigan University (EMU) was a state-supported institution on about 200 acres that straddled the city-township line. There were roughly 7,200 students enrolled in 1963, but rapid expansion was expected, with over 10,000 students projected for the 1965-6 academic year. This meant that EMU was looking to expand its facilities and an ambitious building program was under way.²³ This program would later have a beneficial effect on the YGT.

Located only forty miles west of Detroit, Ypsilanti's largest industry was, of course, the auto industry and related manufacturing. The shift towards manufacturing had greatly accelerated during World War II. The Willow Run Bomber Plant, built in 1941, produced nearly nine thousand B-24 Liberator bombers by V-E Day. Located in

²² "The Founding of Ypsilanti," Teddy Farres Papers, Author's Collection (hereafter cited as Farres papers).

²³ *Ypsilanti City Directory* (n.p.: R.L. Polk, 1963) vii – xii.

Ypsilanti Township, the plant employed roughly forty-two thousand people. Large numbers of them had migrated from Appalachia.²⁴ After the war, the booming auto industry was able to employ many of these people. They stayed and settled in the township and city, earning the slightly derogatory appellation of Ypsituckians.

The desperate need to house the thousands of newcomers to the area kept dozens of Ypsilanti's older homes in use. Consequently, by the early 1960s, a number of prominent citizens were strongly interested in working to preserve Ypsilanti's historic homes. The city had "an extremely active Ypsilanti Historical Society, an official city historian and a City Historical Committee."²⁵

The World War II population influx changed the demographics of Ypsilanti and different demographic groups became concentrated in specific areas of the city. The East Side held the most autoworkers; the University and other professional workers dominated the north and west; and economically disadvantaged African-Americans were concentrated on the South Side. Though the community is somewhat more integrated, these divisions still exist in Ypsilanti today.

As might be expected, there were tensions created by these demographics. These tensions were exacerbated by the city's inability to expand its tax base geographically. Ypsilanti is completely surrounded by townships and EMU holds acres of property off the tax rolls. This put pressure on the city to look for ways to develop businesses within the city limits, predisposing civic leaders towards the promotion of new industries such as the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. It also meant that the most contentious issues brought

²⁴ Ruth Bordin, *Washtenaw County: An Illustrated History* (n.p.: Windsor Publications, 1988) 80-1.

²⁵ "National Drive Planned for Restoration Here," *Ypsilanti Press*, 11 February 1963.

before the Ypsilanti City Council in the 1960s were the rezoning of residential areas and Urban Renewal. Urban Renewal was a federal program for the revitalization of dilapidated urban areas that met with very limited success in the city of Ypsilanti.²⁶

This, then, was the city in which Mrs. Clara Godwin Owens (Figure 1) wished to establish a Greek Theatre Festival. Owens turned 58 years old in 1963. She was born in Alfordsville, Indiana, graduated from high school in Franklin, Indiana and received her bachelor of arts degree from the local Franklin College in 1926. After college, she taught high school for a year before she married J. Henry Owens. Her husband was a professor of classic languages including, of course, Greek. Various teaching positions kept the couple moving for a while and included a year at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1940, they settled in Ypsilanti as Professor Owens accepted the position of head of the Department of Foreign Languages at Michigan State Normal College.²⁷



Figure 1 – Clara Owens

²⁶ Council Proceedings, July 1962 – June 1968, Ypsilanti City Council, Ypsilanti City Hall (hereafter cited as Council Proceedings).

²⁷ Editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 16 March 1965.

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While J. Henry Owens served in World War II, Clara worked at the Ford Bomber Plant and the Ypsilanti Office of Price Administration. By the mid 1950s she had gone back to teaching, this time at a junior high, in the neighboring Wayne school district. J. Henry Owens was an unsuccessful Democratic candidate for the United States Congress in 1954.

Once the Greek Theatre began to demand a great deal of her time, Owens took an unpaid leave of absence from her teaching job. Mrs. Owens was active in various community causes and organizations, including the City Historical Society and the Ypsilanti Players, one of the first community-based “Little Theatre” groups in the nation.²⁸ Both Clara and J. Henry Owens were involved in Players: J. Henry as an actor, Clara as a prompter. Clara recruited several members of the Ypsilanti Players to help with YGT.²⁹

Clara Owens died in 1985 in Longboat Key, Florida, where she and J. Henry had moved after his retirement from EMU in 1974. Those who remember her describe Owens as an extremely charming and persuasive woman with boundless energy. She was “feisty” and “easy to understand and fun to be with and somebody that’s worth knowing.” She was also “very forceful” and “very possessive” about the whole project.³⁰ Almost every interviewee referred to the YGT as “Clara’s baby.” Board members soon learned that it was “Clara’s way or no way Clara was running things, and what Clara wanted Clara got.” She could be manipulative, threatening the board that she

²⁸ Raymond Nichols, “The History of the Ypsilanti Players 1915-1931” (master’s thesis, Eastern Michigan University, 1969) 19.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Judy Rumelhart, interview by author, tape recording, Ann Arbor, MI, 14 August 1997; John Mayhew, interview by author, tape recording, Ann Arbor, MI, 4 June 1998; James W. Gousseff, interview by author, tape recording, Ypsilanti, MI, 13 August 1997.

would walk out on the project. “. . . [S]he was forever hinting that, if things didn’t go her way, she would take her bat and ball and go home.”³¹ Disinterested observer, Jay Carr of the *Detroit News* noted that, “At first glance Mrs. Owens strikes one as just another fluttery clubwoman, but after spending five minutes in conversation with her you realize she is a lady to be reckoned with.”³²

A desire to “run things” may have been a motivating factor in Clara Owens’ decision to pursue the establishment of a Greek Theatre Festival in Ypsilanti, but there were others as well. Clara Owens’ husband told the *Ypsilanti Press* in March 1965 that “her major interest is to create something which will revitalize the city. The theatre is a means to an end.”³³ She may have chosen Greek Theatre as that particular means to an end because of her husband’s connection to the classics through his work and the couple’s interest in theatre as demonstrated by their participation in the Ypsilanti Players. Both the Owenses had a deep appreciation of classical Greek culture and the drama of ancient Greece.

Another motivation may have been a desire to put Ypsilanti “on the map” culturally. The city’s blue-collar image and its proximity to Ann Arbor, just seven miles away, with the cultural resources of the University of Michigan at its disposal, often create the attitude that Ypsilanti is a lower class, unsophisticated, cultural backwater. This condescension rankles and produces tension and competition between the two cities. Clara Owens was not immune to this sense of competition. At one point, frustrated with “the AA [Ann Arbor] people,” she wrote to a friend, “Never again will we be nice to AA

³¹ William Anhut, interview by author, tape recording, Ypsilanti, MI, 17 June 1998; Gousseff, interview.

³² Jay Carr, “Her Dream: Greek Theater for Ypsilanti,” *Detroit News*, 7 June 1964.

³³ “Mrs. Clara G. Owens: Who Else Could’ve Done the Job?” editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*,

and go to them. They can come to us!”³⁴ The APA–University of Michigan collaboration was at the peak of its success in 1963. What would a professional theatre company do for Ypsilanti? Clara Owens’ dream was of a Greek Theatre Festival as successful as the Stratford Festival in Canada. Such a dream made tangible would bring Ypsilanti out from under the shadow of Ann Arbor – permanently.

It is not clear how long Clara Owens had been nurturing the idea of an Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Festival. A March 1963 newspaper article quoted J. Henry Owens as claiming, “the possibility of a Greek Theatre had been discussed for years.”³⁵ A YGT press release asserts that the stimulus to put a plan in motion came early in 1963 from a group of friends gathered in the Owens’ living room over after-dinner drinks. Her dinner party guests were so enthusiastic about “her dream” that Clara Owens was persuaded to try to make it a reality.³⁶

Several of the early supporters of YGT were members of the Ypsilanti Players. Bert Gardner, the first vice-president of YGT, was president of the community theater group. Dr. Bradley Harris, his wife, Mildred, and Virginia Morgan were also involved in both groups. However, despite the large number of interested amateurs involved in planning the Greek Theatre, the goal from the outset was for a professional theatre company of the highest quality.

An extremely important supporter of the Greek Theatre concept was James P. Brown, Jr., editor of the *Ypsilanti Press*. He was deeply concerned with revitalizing

16 March 1965.

³⁴ Clara Owens to Teddy, John, and Evans Farres, 23 November 1964, Farres Papers.

³⁵ “Restoration Supported,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 March 1963.

³⁶ “The Story of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre,” Community Achievement Binder, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum (hereafter cited as YGT collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum).

Ypsilanti and saw tourist dollars as a key to that revitalization. A favorite statistic of the *Ypsilanti Press* was that every 28 tourists benefited a community as much as a \$100,000 industry.³⁷ Brown used his editorials to support projects he believed would stimulate tourism and chief among those were: a push to restore and preserve Ypsilanti's historic homes, the establishment of a city historical museum, and the Greek Theatre concept.

Eventually, Brown proposed that an umbrella group be formed to promote all these different projects, including the Greek Theatre. The non-profit, tax-exempt corporation was named Project 73, because its goal was to complete restoration projects and establish the Greek Theatre in time for Ypsilanti's sesquicentennial celebration in 1973. On 6 June 1963, the Ypsilanti Historical Society invited Dr. Lewis Beeson, Secretary to the State Historical Commission, to speak on the merits of their plan. Dr. Beeson was enthusiastic. He mentioned that a nationally known Greek theatre could tie in with Eastern Michigan University, allowing the University to become known as a center of Greek learning. He also advised "that priorities be selected and that the first undertaking be something that will be a show piece to launch the program."³⁸ The Greek Theatre was, by far, the best organized and most ambitious of the plans that made up Project 73, so hopes were high that, perhaps, it would become that show piece.³⁹

At the June 6 meeting, Dr. William P. Edmunds was chosen as Project 73's chairman. It was stressed at that gathering that each group involved in implementing

³⁷ "Side Attractions Needed in Area," editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 14 August 1963; "It Could Be Tremendous," editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 5 February 1963; "Restoration Supported," *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 March 1963.

³⁸ "Historical Group Takes First Incorporation Step," *Ypsilanti Press*, 7 June 1963.

³⁹ William P. Edmunds, interview by author, tape recording, Ypsilanti, MI, 27 August 1997.

Project 73, including the Greek Theatre, would retain their separate identities.⁴⁰ Clara Owens did not trust this assurance, however. According to Edmunds, Owens “went up in smoke because she thought that we were trying to co-opt her baby. [She thought] we were trying to take [the Greek Theatre] over, rather than, we were interested in being able to offer what assistance we could.”⁴¹ On June 17, Owens wrote to Bert Gardener that she was “firmly of the conviction that *no* group should be formed to supersede us.”⁴² In another letter written in November 1966, Owens claimed that, “From the time I made public my idea of a Greek Theatre there has been interference. A small group, led by Dr. Bradley Harris, formed an organization, called Project 73, and wanted to take over the idea and the planning.”⁴³

Harris was, indeed, active in Project 73. His major focus was with the group that wanted to establish a city historical museum.⁴⁴ That group and those interested in historic preservation would soon come into conflict with the Greek Theatre over the fate of a beautiful old building known variously as the Ladies Library, the Old Library, and the Starkweather Building (named after the family who donated the building to the city of Ypsilanti).

Perhaps because she had so little trust in the leadership of Project 73, Clara Owens moved quickly to incorporate the Greek Theatre as a separate entity, well over a month before the rest of Project 73 was ready to incorporate. Just eight days after Project

⁴⁰ “Historical Group,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 7 June 1963.

⁴¹ Edmunds, interview.

⁴² Owens to Gardner, 17 June 1963 (italics in original), Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Collection, Clara Owens Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan).

⁴³ Owens to Wes [Congressman Wes Vivian?], 22 November 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. [Bradley Harris was an Ypsilanti physician who was active in many civic organizations including the Ypsilanti Players.]

73 was announced, Owens called a meeting of the Greek Theatre group. They voted unanimously to pursue incorporation and elected Clara Owens as their president.

Steve Spilos attended the meeting. Spilos, a prominent Greek-American from Detroit, described the Greek Theatre as the “pivot” of Project 73 and mentioned the possibility of support from AHEPA, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association.⁴⁵ AHEPA is a fraternal organization of Greek-Americans. Spilos was also president of the Detroit World’s Fair Committee. That group hoped that the success of Project 73 in Ypsilanti would aid their lobbying to locate the 1972 World’s Fair in Detroit. Spilos would eventually become a member of the first board of YGT.

The Greek Theatre’s association with Project 73 may have been helpful in securing the endorsement of AHEPA. Spilos and other members of AHEPA sought and received pledges from the organization of “financial and moral support” for Project 73 first from the Detroit chapter, then the district, and finally at the national level in August 1963.⁴⁶ The organizers of the Greek Theatre pinned many of their hopes on this promised financial support which, unfortunately, never materialized.

Association with Project 73 may have also helped YGT gain support with the Ypsilanti City Council and Chamber of Commerce. Instead of a single interest group, asking for support, the council and chamber were faced with a smorgasbord of projects aimed at revitalizing the city’s economy. There was something for everyone in Project 73. For whatever reason, support for the Greek Theatre was strong among most civic leaders.

⁴⁴ Edmunds, interview.

⁴⁵ “Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Group Set,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 14 June 1963.

⁴⁶ “Order of AHEPA Backs Project 73,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 23 August 1963.

The incorporation process of the Greek Theatre was completed and the first organizational meeting held on 26 September 1963. By-laws were adopted. Clara Owens was again elected president. The vice-president was Bert Gardner and Virginia Morgan was secretary. Theodora (Teddy) Farres, a woman of Greek extraction, was elected treasurer. She and her husband, John, owned buildings in downtown Ypsilanti, one of which they allowed YGT to use as office space, first free-of-charge and then later for a nominal fee.⁴⁷ Other board members included: prominent Greek-Americans such as Nicholas Georges, supreme governor of the national order of AHEPA; leading Ypsilanti businessmen such as Worden Geer, a funeral home director and Thor Marsh, an owner of an office supply store; members of the city's social and financial elite such as Daniel Quirk and Marie Cleary; and *Ypsilanti Press* editor, James Brown, Jr. and drama critic, Eileen Harrison. A connection to Eastern Michigan University was made through the appointment of Albert Brown, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.⁴⁸

The projected opening was for 1965 and plans called for the recruitment of the Greek National Theatre of Athens along with a few big-name stars. The first season was to be in a tent, as Stratford's first season had been. YGT hoped to locate the tent in the city-owned Riverside Park.⁴⁹ It was believed that the sharply sloping bluff leading down to the banks of the Huron River would provide a natural amphitheater for performances. At one point, it was suggested that stone benches could be imbedded in the bank in imitation of ancient Greek theatres.⁵⁰ The park location was also regarded as desirable because it was immediately behind a corridor of historic homes which Project 73 hoped

⁴⁷ Teddy Farres, interview by author, tape recording, Ypsilanti, MI, 20 August 1997.

⁴⁸ "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Organizes," *Ypsilanti Press*, 27 September 1963.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Ypsilanti Project 73 Launched," *Ypsilanti Press*, 3 July 1963.

to restore. At the September 1963 organizational meeting, Owens announced her intention to approach the Ypsilanti City Council about the Riverside Park site, first for the tent and then later for a \$1½ - \$2 million permanent theatre building.⁵¹

In October 1963, YGT's first request for the park was referred by city council to the City Planning Commission. YGT suggested that the city let them use part of Riverside Park at no cost or lease it to them for one dollar per year; the buildings built by YGT would become assets of the city. Any transfer of land away from the city would have required a ballot referendum. The leasing strategy avoided any potential voter rejection of the plan.⁵² There were several delays as the Planning Commission and city council requested more detailed information from YGT. The major concerns of city officials were the impact of the theatre on parking and other downtown businesses. YGT officials responded that they could not make detailed plans or hire an architect until they had a commitment on the site.⁵³ The theatre group did hire a Detroit architect to produce a "Basic Area Report" which estimated the amount of space the theatre would need. The report included a drawing that suggested how a theatre building might fit into the park (Figure 2 and 3).⁵⁴

In the meanwhile, the city's Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), an offshoot of the Chamber of Commerce, made a startling proposal to the city council. Ypsilanti had recently sold its Beyer Memorial Hospital to a private company for \$300,000. The sale resulted in a windfall to the city's capital improvement fund. The

⁵¹ "YGT Organizes."

⁵² "Planners to Study Request for Greek Theatre in Park," *Ypsilanti Press*, 8 October 1963.

⁵³ "Council Will Decide Soon On Theater Site," *Ypsilanti Press*, 12 November 1963.

⁵⁴ John D. Lee, "Basic Area Report For a Greek Theatre Building Sponsored by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Incorporated," Farres Papers.

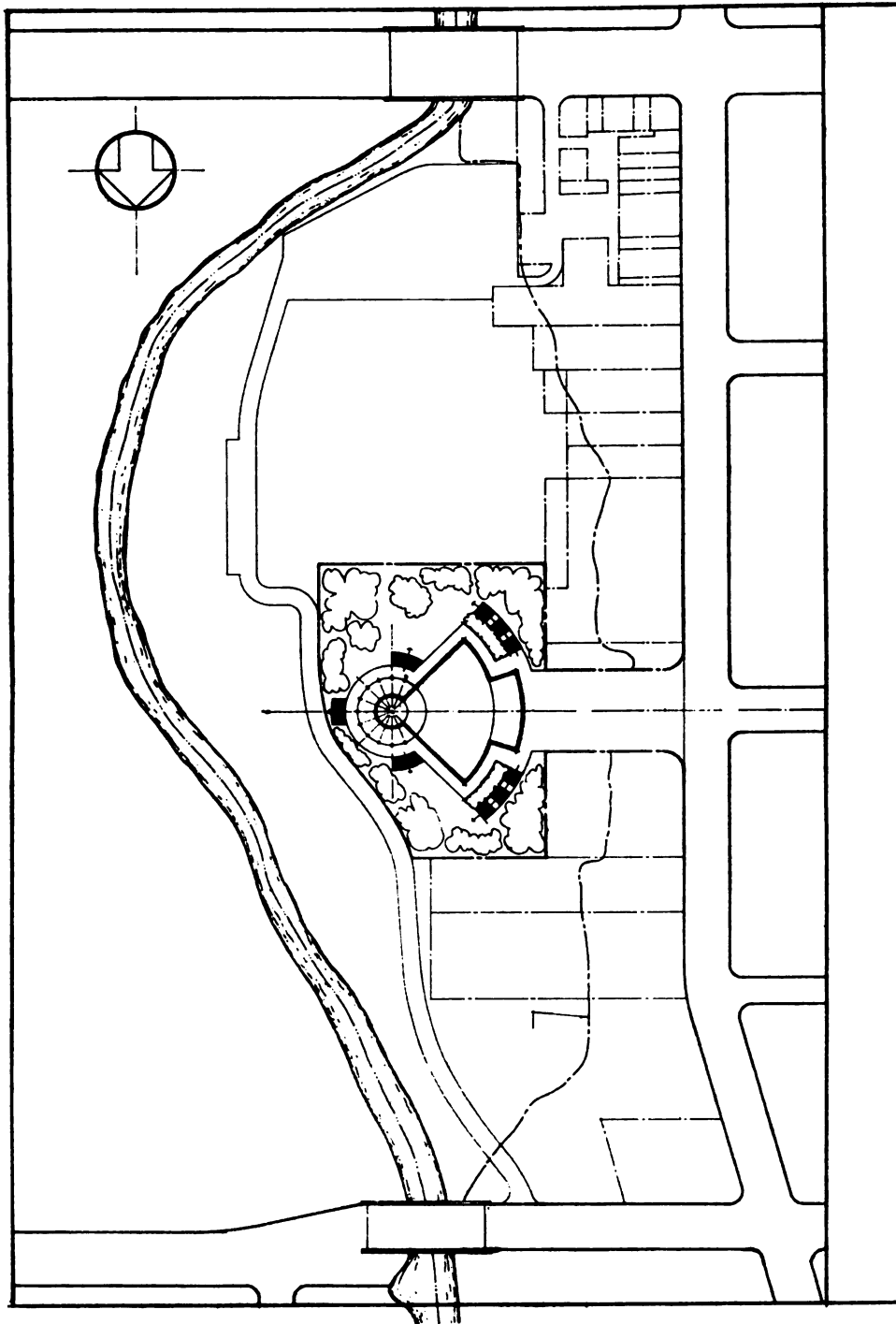


Figure 2 – Basic Area Report

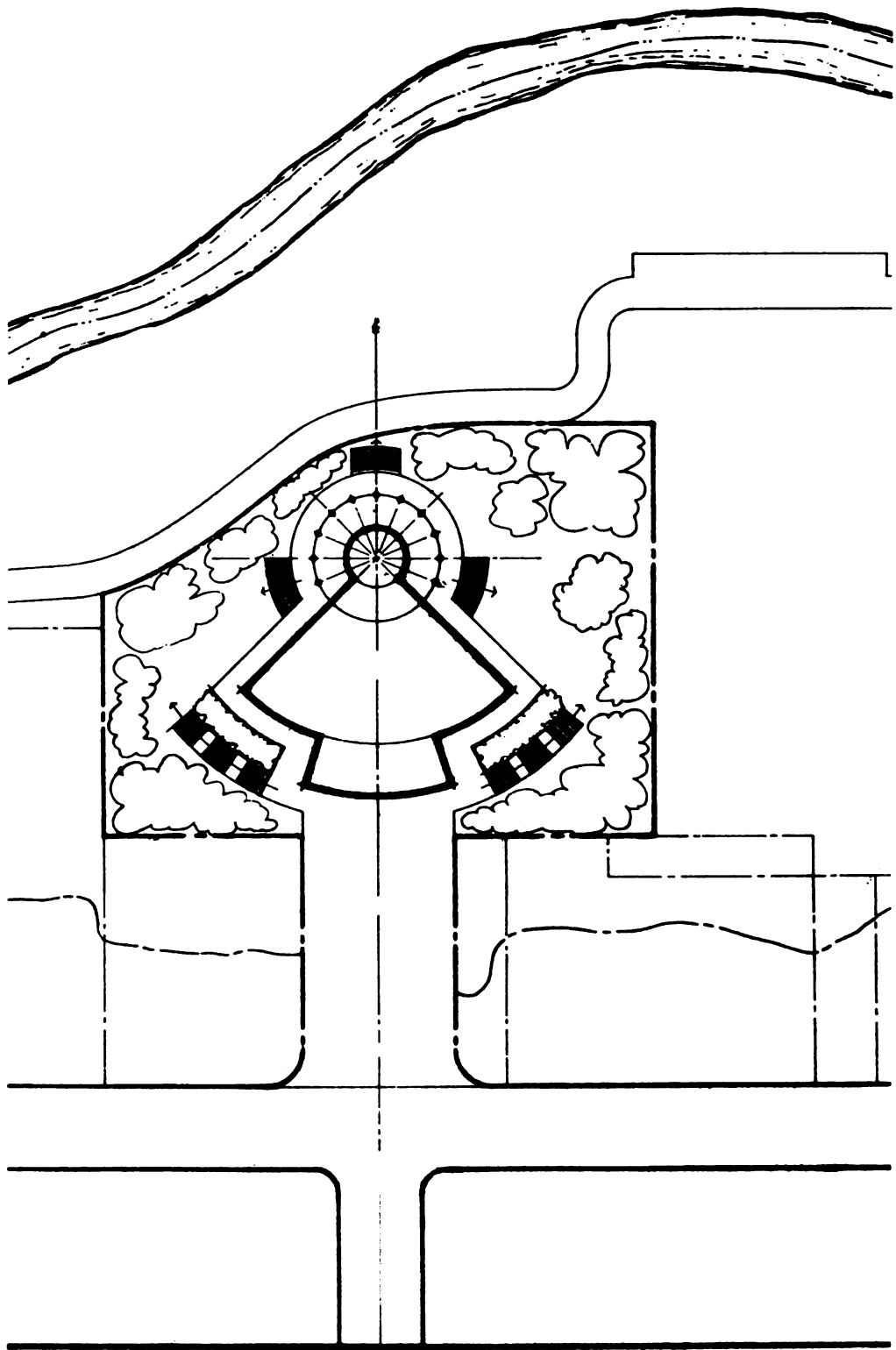


Figure 3 – Basic Area Report: Detail

IDC suggested that the city pledge \$100,000 to the Greek Theatre in addition to donating the site in Riverside Park, providing that Project 73 was able to match the funds within a year. According to the IDC, this would mean the city would not need to “surrender the actual money until success of the project was assured.” Furthermore, the one-year time limit would act as a stimulus to the fundraising campaign.⁵⁵

The Industrial Development Corporation based their request on the Greek Theatre’s potential for stirring economic development in the entire area. They urged Ypsilanti Township and nearby Superior Township to consider similar support of the program. Their proposal stressed the economic benefits Stratford, Ontario enjoyed as a result of its festival. Dr. Bradley Harris was a director of IDC. He told the *Ypsilanti Press*, “Nothing could do more for Ypsilanti than the successful completion of Project 73 and especially the Greek Theatre.”⁵⁶

Clara Owens was confident that YGT could raise the funds within the allotted time. She mentioned the pledged support of AHEPA and said, “If the city accepts the IDC’s recommendation, this is the actual commitment by Ypsilanti which is all we need to start a nation-wide fund-raising campaign.” It would be proof that Ypsilanti was, indeed, serious about the Greek Theatre.⁵⁷

James P. Brown, Jr. wrote an enthusiastic editorial endorsing the IDC proposal. He mentioned the Stratford experience and AHEPA’s pledge of support. However, in calling for the city council to act on the IDC proposal, Brown made an assumption that must have further provoked Clara Owens’ suspicions that Project 73 was trying to take

⁵⁵ “IDC Asks City To Pledge \$100,000 For Theater Plan,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 23 October 1963.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

over the Greek Theatre concept. Brown wrote, “profits from the theatre can be plunged back into other phases of Project 73 – home restoration, development of historic sites, museums, galleries and so on.”⁵⁸

Ypsilanti City Council was not enthusiastic about the IDC proposal. Meeting in a special study session, they indicated that they were in favor of offering matching funds to YGT. However, the council wanted definite cost estimates and detailed plans for building and fundraising before they would commit to any dollar amounts.⁵⁹ It was during this study session that one of the strangest incidents connected with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre occurred.

The city of Ypsilanti has a marble bust of General Demetrius Ypsilanti prominently displayed in front of its distinctively phallic water tower. Both structures grace one of the major entrances to the city. The weekend before the council study session, pranksters had celebrated Halloween a few days early by crowning the stone-faced Demetrius with a giant pumpkin balanced precariously on his head. The day of the study session, the *Ann Arbor News* published a feature photo of the distinctly decorated General. Unfortunately, associating a person with a pumpkin in Greek culture is akin to calling him a jackass in American culture. To add injury to insult, publication of this disgrace occurred on the twenty-third anniversary of the invasion of Greece by Italian Fascist troops. Five Ann Arbor residents of either Greek citizenship or parentage, one of them a pastor of a Greek Orthodox church, demanded that the Ypsilanti City Council

⁵⁸ “Startling, But a Fine Idea!” *Ypsilanti Press*, 24 October 1963.

⁵⁹ “Council ‘Favorable’ To Bid For Greek Theater Support,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 October 1963.

hear their protest. The harangue lasted well over an hour and ended in what the *Ypsilanti Press* termed, “a near riot.”⁶⁰

The Mayor of Ypsilanti, John Calder, had asked John and Teddy Farres to attend the session. The couple spoke fluent Greek and would be able to help explain American customs to their incensed compatriots. Clara Owens was also in attendance as much for the regular business of the meeting as for the infamous Pumpkin Incident, as the evening came to be known.

A Mr. Meimaridis of Macedonia, acting as spokesman for the group, demanded that the pumpkin pranksters be pursued and punished by police. Mayor Calder replied that since the distinguished Demetrius had endured no damage, the pranksters, if caught, would not be punished. Meimaridis informed the council that he had called the White House, the supreme governor of AHEPA, and the Greek Ambassador to the United States to report the incident. Despite repeated assurances that no insult was intended and that the city of Ypsilanti had the utmost respect for all things Greek, Mr. Meimaridis and the Ann Arbor assemblage refused to be mollified. Somewhat frustrated, Teddy Farres told Mr. Meimaridis that he was “making a mountain out of a molehill” and that Macedonia “is not even a part of Greece.” Meimaridis “jumped to his feet, advanced to Mrs. Farres, and threatened several times to kill her. City Manager W. Robert Semple quickly went to his office to call the police while others in the room tried to calm the shouting man.”⁶¹

Fortunately, serious bodily harm was averted and the Ann Arborites were ejected from the meeting. The council of the Greek Orthodox Church in Ann Arbor sent a letter of regret to the Mayor and city council of Ypsilanti telling them that the obstreperous

⁶⁰ “Pumpkin Stirs Uproar In Council,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 October 1963.

⁶¹ Ibid.

behavior of Mr. Meimaridis and company in no way represented the Greek people of the area or their church.⁶² In the meanwhile, the perpetrators of the pumpkin incident remain at liberty to this very day.

There were two more delays and another study session before the Planning Commission recommended conditional approval of donating part of Riverside Park for YGT's use. The condition was that a professional planning consultant be hired to explore whether the site was "adequate and adaptable to other elements of the community plan." The cost of the consultant was to be paid by the city. YGT would be granted use of the park only if the consultant deemed the site appropriate.⁶³

John D. Telfer, chairman of the Planning Commission, hired the Ann Arbor firm of Johnson, Johnson, and Roy. YGT officials protested when the company announced that the study would take four months. They felt they needed a commitment from the city much earlier than that in order to proceed with fundraising and the search for an architect. A compromise was reached when the study was divided into two phases. The first phase, determining the feasibility of locating the theatre in Riverside Park, was to be completed within ten weeks, after which YGT could expect a final decision by city council.

All this delay further fueled Clara Owens' suspicions that others were trying to take over her "baby." Complaining about Bradley Harris in November 1966, she wrote:

when YGT asked for permission to conduct a fund raising drive in [Ypsilanti, Harris] gave me, with his toady, Don Ruffer, Secretary of [the Chamber of] Commerce, one of the most derogatory inquisitions I could have thought of . . . He tried to hamstring YGT completely. Also Harris tried to employ Johnson, Johnson & Roy, a very reputable firm in [Ann

⁶² "Pumpkin Incident' Regretted," *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 October 1963.

⁶³ "City Planners Urge Giving River Park Site for Theater," *Ypsilanti Press*, 14 November 1963.

Arbor], to make a survey of sites, etc. for the Theatre. When they found it would cost \$4500, they persuaded the City, through John Telfer, a member of the planning commission here, to undertake the survey, they hoped that the site selected by the YGT directors, would be unsuitable . . . this didn't happen. This small group composed of Harris, Jim Brown, Ruffer, Dr. Edmunds, City Manager Semple, John Telfer and two others have done everything to stop Clara [*sic*] and to take over and have control. The situation grew worse as the Theatre idea and money grew.⁶⁴

Clara Owens' suspicions notwithstanding, city officials seem to have been genuinely supportive of YGT. Despite their caution in committing money and land without a detailed plan in hand, they did give the Greek Theatre precedence over the other elements of Project 73. This is evident in their decisions regarding the fate of the Ladies Library.

This historic structure (Figure 4 and 5) stands on the bluff directly east of Riverside Park, one of the most elegant of many such buildings along North Huron Street. In 1963, the Ladies Library stood empty, in a state of some disrepair. It was owned by the city, having recently served as the public library, which had since been relocated to more spacious quarters.

The Ypsilanti Historical Committee wanted to convert the Ladies Library into a city historical museum. As early as March 1963, they requested that the city dedicate the building to that purpose. When Project 73 was formed, the Ladies Library figured prominently in proposals for the creation of a museum. Despite repeated requests for use of the building, city council kept deferring their decision on the Ladies Library. Of some concern was the amount of money required to bring the structure up to code, but their

⁶⁴ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

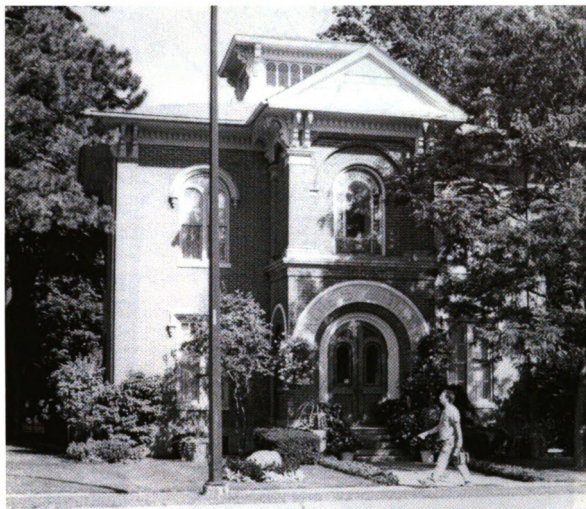


Figure 4 – The Ladies Library: Front Façade



Figure 5 – The Ladies Library: View from NE Corner

primary reason for delay was that the house stood directly in front of the proposed Greek Theatre site. Council eventually passed a formal resolution insisting that Greek Theatre plans be completed before a disposition of the Ladies Library was determined. Only if a museum would not interfere with YGT's overall plans would the council consider making the building available for museum purposes.⁶⁵

Tom Patterson may have generated some of this council support for the Greek Theatre. YGT paid the originator of the Stratford Festival to give a speech in Ypsilanti on 14 November 1963. The speech had been delayed one day so that more members of city council could attend. "Establish Ypsilanti as the center of Greek culture on this continent and you'll have the world beating at your door," Patterson told them. He also cautioned that the use of a tent was too expensive and suggested that YGT choose their theatre personnel before they chose an architect because few theatre designers adequately considered the needs of the players. Patterson felt that YGT's emphasis should be on quality from the beginning, but warned prophetically, "the best plays will do no good unless the audience is adequate."⁶⁶

Patterson also spoke at length about the economic advantages the Festival brought to Stratford. These statistics would figure prominently in YGT's promotional materials. In the ten years since the Stratford Festival's beginning, twenty-two new industries had been added to the city. The Festival employed forty people year round and, at the height of the season, nearly five hundred jobs were available with a yearly payroll of \$750,000. Visitors to the Festival stayed an average of 2½ days, bringing in \$2½ - \$3 million. Six new motels had been built in Stratford, as well as others in nearby towns. Thirty-six

⁶⁵ Council Proceedings, Regular Meeting, 16 December 1963.

⁶⁶ "Stratford Speaker Urges Theater Here," *Ypsilanti Press*, 15 November 1963.

thousand people stayed in bed and breakfasts in 1963. Six new restaurants plied their trade.⁶⁷ With such a rosy picture before them, there was no wonder that the city council was interested in the success of the Greek Theatre.

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre took a number of disparate actions in December 1963. Approaches were made to the Greek National Theatre in Athens. One plan called for the transplantation of the whole company (one wonders if they expected all the actors to be fluent in English). Owens and Gardner flew to Washington D.C. for a meeting at the Greek Embassy. They told Greek officials about the project to date and asked for assistance in importing talent from Greece, help with publicity in Greece, expertise in planning a Greek setting for the theatre, Greek statuary, and a fund for annual prizes for translations or a University Chair in Greek Literature at Eastern Michigan University.⁶⁸ Back home in Ypsilanti, Professor P. L. Zickgraf of the Department of History and Social Sciences at EMU was appointed chairman of a translations committee. The estimated costs of architect's fees and the advisability of hiring professional fundraisers were discussed. John Langer, a member of the YGT board of directors, volunteered to be an administrative director of the business office for three months beginning in the new year.⁶⁹ If the Greek National Theatre Company could not be secured for a 1965 summer season, YGT's goal was to open with their own professional company in 1966.⁷⁰

Summer theatre festivals were an important part of the decentralization of

⁶⁷ Clara Owens, "Notes from a Talk by Tom Patterson," and "The Stratford Story," Farres Papers.

⁶⁸ "Preliminary Report on the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, December 1963," YGT Collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

⁶⁹ "Langer Named Administrator for Ypsilanti Greek Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 6 December 1963.

⁷⁰ "Preliminary Report."

American theatre in the early 1960s, when Clara Owens decided to investigate the possibility of starting a festival dedicated to the professional production of classical Greek theatre in her adopted hometown of Ypsilanti. City leaders were receptive to Owens' idea as she organized and incorporated her theatre group. The Greek Theatre concept was included in an umbrella group of civic projects known as Project 73 and the Ypsilanti City Council granted conditional approval to a plan to donate city park land to the theatre group. By the end of 1963, despite Clara Owens' frustration with delays by the council and her distrust of Project 73, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Incorporated was well established and moving forward.

CHAPTER TWO

YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE, 1964 – 1965

“I THINK WE ARE READY TO MOVE”

The three major issues facing the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre in the years 1964 – 1965 were fundraising, personnel, and the theatre’s physical plant. Significant progress was made in all three areas, but not without controversy. A local \$200,000 fundraising drive was successful, but a professionally prepared feasibility report questioned the board’s ability to sustain a national campaign. An artistic director was hired, but some members of the board felt that he was hired far too soon and for far too much money. A reputable architect was engaged and plans were approved, but the battle over the Ladies Library continued. A chronological description of the events pertaining to YGT in the years 1964 – 1965 will illustrate how the progress and controversy in each of these three areas was interrelated.

On 5 January 1964, Clara Owens called an executive meeting of the YGT board. Her agenda told the directors, “Only you can decide. I think we are ready to move.” Fundraising was a large part of the agenda. Owens wanted to discuss approaches to foundations, individual philanthropists, AHEPA members, and political figures such as Governor George Romney, Senators Phillip Hart and Patrick McNamara, and Mayor Jerome P. Cavanaugh of Detroit. Also in the planning stages were: a big “kick-off dinner” for the local campaign, an open house for the opening of the new offices in downtown Ypsilanti, and a letter to other directors warning them that they could be

removed from the board after absences at four consecutive meetings.¹ It would seem that not every director was working as hard towards the goals of YGT as Clara Owens believed they ought.

The open house on January 24 was an unqualified success. Between 150 and 200 people attended and some had to be turned away because the modestly-sized offices could not hold them all.² By the end of the month, the local chapter of the woman's club, Zonta, had pledged the proceeds of its annual fund-raiser to YGT. The resulting \$685.61, received at the end of March, was YGT's largest contribution to date and sorely needed for office operating expenses.³

Meanwhile, the Ypsilanti Historical Society continued its efforts to obtain the Ladies Library for a city museum. On January 30, the two hundred members of the society, headed by Dr. Bradley Harris, voted to back a proposal calling for the museum to be located there. Just two weeks later, at a Project 73 organizational meeting, Clara Owens, the historical society, and the rest of Project 73 gave no sign that there were any internal conflicts between the groups. However, it is clear that both YGT and the Ypsilanti Historical Society were still pursuing their separate agendas with city council.⁴

YGT wanted a decision from the council on the theatre site. They sent a letter to council in mid-February. Despite Owens' warnings that more delay could, "jeopardize the initial enthusiasm by the community," council members insisted on waiting for the report of Johnson, Johnson, and Roy. Perhaps in an attempt to placate Owens, Mayor

¹ Owens, "Executive Meeting Agenda," 5 January 1964, Farres Papers.

² "Attendance Crowds Out Ceremonies," *Ann Arbor News*, 25 January 1964.

³ "Zonta Is Theatre Angel," *Ypsilanti Press*, 31 March 1964.

⁴ "History Society Backs Museum," *Ypsilanti Press*, 31 January 1964; "Century Home

John Calder suggested that the council give YGT “a little more support . . . something a little more tangible than words – such as allocating some capital improvements so they can start setting their plans in motion.”⁵ The idea was referred to a council study session where “no definite plans were made.”⁶

The Ypsilanti Historical Society managed to get the Ladies Library issue on the agenda of that same study session. Council members heard a report estimating the costs of converting the building into a museum at over \$25,000. As little as \$3,800 in repairs would render the building usable as a temporary storage facility for the society’s collections. However, Councilman John Burton warned that once use of the building was permitted, the Council might have a difficult time getting it emptied out again.⁷ The Historical Society was asked, once again, to wait. Members were impatient with the delay. They were concerned that the unheated building was deteriorating.⁸

It would not be until the May 2 city council meeting that another attempt would be made to secure the old library as a museum. This time the request came from Ypsilanti’s highly respected city historian, Foster Fletcher. The costs of maintaining the building and the need to wait until the Greek Theatre site was chosen were the familiar reasons that Fletcher’s request was also rejected.⁹

Ypsilanti City Council definitely regarded the Greek Theatre as a high priority for the community. Five of the six candidates running for council in April 1964 mentioned

Section Near Realty, Project 73 Told,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 14 February 1964.

⁵ Council Proceedings, Regular Meeting, 17 February 1964.

⁶ “Greek Theater Site Report Date Set,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 25 February 1964.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “First Museum Decision Date Set,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 27 March 1964.

⁹ Council Proceedings, Regular Meeting, 2 March 1964.

the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre in their responses to a League of Women Voters survey. When asked, "What programs should be or have been undertaken in the community by the council to mark Ypsilanti as a forward-moving community," most of the respondents put YGT at or near the top of their list. City Planning Commissioner, "Red" Averill asserted that "Project 73 and the Greek Theatre . . . should be supported as they will aid in making Ypsilanti a better community in which to live." Councilman Burton believed that, "The Greek Theatre should be built on the Huron River and \$25,000 in 'seed' money should be made available from the Capital Improvements Fund to help expedite this community project." Councilman Ernest Therkelsen responded, "The important moves being made are the urban renewal program, and active pursuit of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre and Project 73. The actions taken by the council to assure the proper overall area planning for these projects are essential."¹⁰

On April 23, the long-awaited preliminary report of Johnson, Johnson, and Roy was made public. Several Ypsilanti locations other than Riverside Park had been evaluated, including the campus of Eastern Michigan University. The firm recommended the park site for several reasons. It would allow the business district, which currently was strung out along an east/west axis, to expand to the north, creating a more compact and centralized downtown. The theatre would also make use of the prime river-valley property in the city's center without destroying the park-like quality of the area. Johnson, Johnson, and Roy, moreover, believed the theatre would be instrumental in stimulating the growth of other businesses in the area.¹¹

¹⁰ "Ypsilanti Council Candidates Answer LWV Questions," *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 April 1964.

¹¹ "Park Recommended for Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 24 April 1964; "Ypsilanti Park

Six days later, the City Planning Commission unanimously resolved to recommend that the city council approve the Riverside Park site but the resolution did not come until after a lengthy and contentious special meeting. Of major concern were potential parking problems and persons who would be required to pay the costs associated with solving them. At one point, the commission was on the verge of postponing a decision for another week. Clara Owens was at the special meeting, as were Teddy Farres and John Langer of YGT. The three YGT officials protested that such a delay would make it impossible for city council to act on the site before the kick-off dinner scheduled for May 9. Owens warned that such a lack of commitment from the city could “very well could kill this thing.” Three commissioners, including Chairman John Telfer, continued to resist the resolution but eventually relented, on the condition that their comments be included in the record.¹²

On May 4, the city council finally formally approved the leasing of part of Riverside Park for a nominal fee to the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. YGT was required to guarantee the availability of the facilities for public use whenever it was not needed for theatre functions. The exact size and location of the site was to be determined in approximately six weeks, after the second phase of the Johnson, Johnson, and Roy study was complete. Additionally, Councilman Burton directed the city attorney to explore the legality of allocating twenty-five thousand dollars from the capital improvement fund to the private, non-profit group.¹³ In June, the attorney, Kenneth Bronson reported to council that it would be illegal for the city to donate to the operating fund of the theatre.

Site Urged for Theatre,” *Ann Arbor News*, 30 April 1964.

¹² “Planners Endorse Theatre Park Site,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 April 1964.

¹³ “Theatre Site Formally Approved,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 5 May 1964.

He suggested that the city could spend the money on site improvements or on a civic arts commission which, in turn, would provide services to YGT. Neither suggestion was implemented.¹⁴

YGT finally had a commitment on the site from the city, just in time for the kick-off dinner on May 9. Thirty-eight hundred dollars were raised as over 330 people filled the Ypsilanti Armory for the \$25 per-plate dinner. At the time, this fee was considered high in Ypsilanti, even for a benefit dinner. In an editorial praising YGT, James Brown, Jr. commented on the organization's audacity:

‘A \$25 dinner? In Ypsilanti? You’re crazy!’

Six months ago that’s the reaction anyone proposing such a project would have had.

Three months ago that’s exactly the reaction officers of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre received when they started talking about such an event as the kick-off for their campaign to build here a national cultural and tourist center.

Three days ago the dinner was held – to a full house, with an outstanding program, with national and international figures here as special guests, including the first lady of the English theatre, Judith Anderson.¹⁵

Dame Judith Anderson (Figure 6) was one of the leading tragediennes of her day.

A native Australian, she had been honored by the British crown for her contributions to the theatre with the title of Dame Commander of the British Empire. Among her many credits, she had played Queen Gertrude to Sir John Gielgud’s Hamlet; Lady Macbeth opposite Sir Lawrence Olivier and Maurice Evans; Nina Leeds in Eugene O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude*; Lavinia Mann in *Mourning Becomes Electra*; and in film she starred as Mrs. Danvers in the Academy Award winning *Rebecca* and as Big Mama in *Cat on a*

¹⁴ “Restriction Cited on Theatre Aid,” *Ann Arbor News*, 9 June 1964.

¹⁵ “‘Can-do’ Is The Meaning Of Theatre’s First Success,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 12 May 1964.

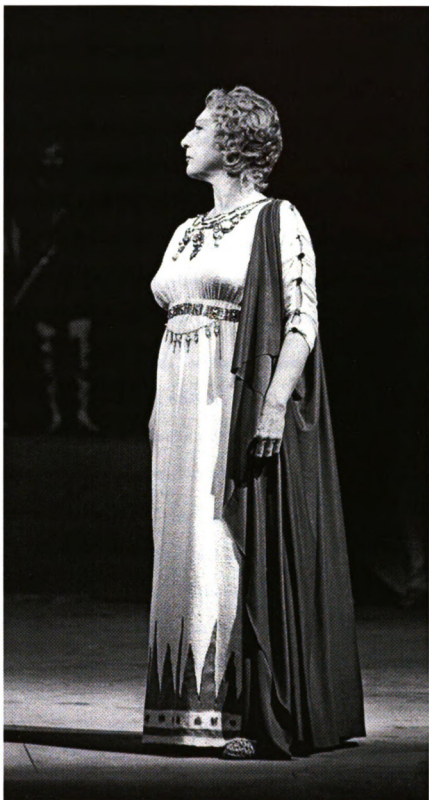


Figure 6 – Dame Judith Anderson as Clytemnestra

Hot Tin Roof. She was most famous, however, for the title role in Robinson Jeffers' freely adapted version of Euripides' *Medea*.¹⁶

Dame Judith made California her home at this time. Clara Owens had interested her in YGT and convinced her to fly in for the kick-off dinner. Anderson politely declined a request to perform that evening because Actor's Equity rules would not allow it. She did speak as part of the program, however, calling the idea of YGT "magnificent and awe inspiring."¹⁷ Anderson was definitely interested in performing in a professional Greek repertory company. In an interview, she recommended importing the Greek National Theatre for the first season and "my *Medea*" for the next.¹⁸

Other guests of honor included Tom Patterson and Alexios Zakynthimos, Vice Consul of the Royal Greek Embassy, Chicago. The Consul General, John Tsaoussi arrived two days later and toured the city and the proposed theatre site. He promised the Greek government would help "in any way it could" with the project.¹⁹

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre hired a professional fundraising firm, Burrill, Inc., of Kansas City, Missouri, to organize their local fund drive. John Calder, still a city councilman but no longer mayor, was appointed chairman of the campaign by the YGT board. Calder was an administrator of Ford Motor Company's General Parts Division and highly respected in the business community. The drive was billed as a building fund

¹⁶ "The Company," Press Information Binder, YGT collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

¹⁷ "Dinner Sends Greek Theatre Toward Two-year Goal," *Ypsilanti Press*, 11 May 1964.

¹⁸ "Miss Anderson Gives Key to Greek Theatre Success," *Ypsilanti Press*, 11 May 1964.

¹⁹ "Greek Theatre Gains Support," *Ypsilanti Press*, 12 May 1964.

campaign and its goal was to raise \$200,000 in seed money at the local level. This figure was ten percent of the projected \$2,000,000 needed to build a theatre and fund the first season. It was believed that if ten percent could be raised at the local level, it would spur significant donations at the national level.²⁰

Over a hundred volunteers were organized into small groups. There was a men's and a women's division. Most of the volunteers had little or no experience with fundraising. Armed with a booklet of soliciting do's and don'ts entitled, "How to Succeed in Capital Fund-Raising by Really Trying," they scoured the Ypsilanti area for pledges. This document asked volunteers to observe a fine line in their solicitations. YGT needed cash payments immediately to pay for the 1966 summer festival, but they also needed larger sums and long-term pledges for the construction of the theatre.

Volunteers were warned that:

There is a danger involved in discussing these objectives of which you need to be aware. *You have to be careful that the prospect does not get the idea of a small cash donation.* These simply will not enable us to achieve our goals.

Consequently, you should emphasize pledges – keeping sights high – but also inform the prospect of the need for immediate cash.

(As a *last resort*, in the case of small cash offering, try to get the prospect to agree to at least the same amount in *each* of the *three years* of this program.)²¹

The large number of pledges made over a three-year period would come back to haunt the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre after the financial difficulties of the opening season made patrons reluctant to honor their outstanding balances.

²⁰ "Theatre Hires Professional Fund Firm," *Ypsilanti Press*, 5 May 1964; "Greek Theatre Plans Fund Drive," *Ann Arbor News*, 26 May 1964.

²¹ "How to Succeed in Capital Fund-Raising by Really Trying," Farres papers (italics in original).

Brochures prepared for the fundraising campaign promised the building would serve the needs of community groups for performance and meeting spaces, when not in use by YGT. They also suggested a season that attempted to create a modern version of a Festival Dionysia. Three types of attractions would play in rotation. First a classical Greek tragedy or comedy would be performed. New, less literary, and more easily acted translations would be commissioned by YGT. The second performance in the triad would be “productions of music and dance that express ethnic values, performed by visiting professional companies from around the world.” The third part of the cycle was to be a “contemporary drama of artistic importance, alternating during the season with modern dance, operettas, and symphonic or jazz concerts.” The purpose was to appeal to a broad range of patrons and to encourage tourists to stay for extended periods to see all the offerings.²² A “sample season” was released and included: *Medea*, starring Dame Judith Anderson; *Lysistrata*; Folklorico Mexicana; the Ballet of the Paris Opera; and two contemporary plays, *The Subject Was Roses* and *The Crucible*.²³

The fundraising drive was scheduled to begin in early June but did not officially begin until June 19. In the first week, YGT raised \$33,430, nearly seventeen percent of their goal. Many of the gifts over \$1,000 came from board members or their businesses. The *Ypsilanti Press* contributed \$5,000 and the women’s division raised \$4,748. The rate of contributions slowed significantly, however, after the first week. Less than ten thousand additional dollars were raised in the second week. It was not until August 1964 that YGT had topped the halfway point towards their goal. The total included pledges

²² “Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Building Fund Campaign,” Farres papers.

²³ “Greek Stratford,” *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 21 August 1964.

from two local banks of \$7,500 each. In November, YGT received a \$25,000 gift from the Ford Fund, a philanthropic service of the Ford Motor Company not to be confused with the Ford Foundation established by the Ford family. This brought the giving level to \$152,000. Finally, in February 1965, a pledge of \$25,000 from General Motors allowed the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre to announce that their goal had been reached.²⁴

Meanwhile, the controversy over the Ladies Library and the theatre site continued. On 8 June 1964, in response to yet another request for the building, the city council met with the City Historical Committee and the Ypsilanti Historical Society for over two and a half hours. The historical groups brought in Solan W. Weeks, director of the Michigan Historical Commission Museum, to convince the council that the Ladies Library should be preserved and converted into a city museum. Clara Owens was there to protect the interests of the Greek Theatre and the meeting became confrontational.

The *Ypsilanti Press* reported that

The discussion last night at times became heated, with Mrs. Clara Owens . . . at one point saying that if the council committed the building for a museum she believed it would be 'wrecking the theatre.' She pointed out the council had committed use of the park area for the theatre . . . Several persons in the audience said they believe the museum idea has been made a 'stepchild' to the theatre in council considerations.²⁵

Richard Skinner, chairman of the City Historical Committee, assured the council that there was no wish on their part to interfere with the theatre. The confrontational

²⁴ "Press Contributes \$5,000 as Theatre Fund Builds Up," *Ypsilanti Press*, 27 June 1964; "Theatre Drive Total Climbs to \$40,900," *Ann Arbor News*, 3 July 1964; "Bank Gives \$7,500 to Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 18 July 1964; "Savings Bank Gives \$7,500," *Ypsilanti Press*, 22 July 1964; "Greek Theatre Reaches \$103,900," *Ypsilanti Press*, 1 August 1964; "Greek Theatre Gets \$25,000 From Ford," *Ann Arbor News*, 12 November 1964; "Theatre Fund Hits Goal of \$200,000," *Ypsilanti Press*, 24 February 1965.

²⁵ "Old Library Given For Museum," *Ypsilanti Press*, 9 June 1964.

atmosphere dissipated somewhat and the desire to cooperate with one another was expressed by both sides. In the end, not much was accomplished as the city council promised the building to the historians, but only if it did not interfere with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.²⁶

Not satisfied, the historical preservation advocates mounted a petition drive to preserve the building “in its present state and location.” Their cause was not helped when the final report of the Johnson, Johnson, and Roy was submitted to council and the Planning Commission on June 29. The report identified three potential sites within Riverside Park for the Greek Theatre. The northern-most site was located where Washtenaw Avenue, a major cross street, intersected with North Huron Street. This was seen as a significant advantage in controlling traffic flow to and from the theatre. The site was also directly east of the Ladies Library and the only way to realize this advantage was to tear down the building and use the space as the primary entrance onto the theatre grounds. The Johnson, Johnson, and Roy report concluded that the “overwhelming indication” was that the building should be removed rather than kept for use as a city museum.

Questioned on this point by city council, firm member William Johnson, conceded that there were “ways you could work around” the building but that it “probably would be in the way. We can see no particular reason why it should be left there.” He further asserted that “because of the great number of historically valuable and significant buildings already in this part of Ypsilanti, it would seem unwise to let this building deter the full development potential of the proposed theatre.” If it were

²⁶ Ibid.

determined that the building must be preserved, he advised that the council carefully evaluate the pros and cons of relocating it.²⁷

Johnson's reasoning was antithetical to the principals of the historical preservationists. The petition drive continued. On July 21, their ninety-six-signature petition was received by city council and filed with no discussion.²⁸

The Johnson, Johnson, and Roy report identified some potential problems with a Riverside Park site. These included the chance of the Huron River flooding and the possibility that flood-plain soil conditions would require special footings for the building's foundation. The report suggested that the theatre be raised above the lower park level, thus creating minor parking facilities for theatre personnel, which could be abandoned in times of flood.²⁹

The Board of Director's meeting on July 9 brought significant personnel changes to YGT. Bert Gardner resigned as vice president because of health problems. Steven Spilos was asked to replace him. To better cope with the intense level of activity, the constitution of the corporation was amended to expand the number of directors from nineteen to twenty-one and an executive committee was formed. New to the board were William Anhut and James W. Gousseff. Anhut, as owner of the Huron Motor Inn, Ypsilanti's largest hotel, had already made significant contributions to the theatre. He had provided free use of his facilities for meetings and receptions and he was a member of the solicitation team for retail business donations.³⁰ James W. Gousseff was the newly

²⁷ "Firm Recommends Old Library Removal," *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 June 1964.

²⁸ "'Save Library' Petitions Filed," *Ypsilanti Press*, 21 July 1964.

²⁹ "Greek Theatre Site Approved," *Ann Arbor News*, 30 June 1964.

³⁰ Anhut interview.

appointed artistic director and professor of theatre at Eastern Michigan University. The new professor had impressive credentials with a Master of Arts in theatre from Cornell, a Master of Fine Arts in directing from Yale, and a doctorate in theatre from Northwestern. Gousseff was asked to get involved with YGT by Albert Brown, Dean of Arts and Sciences at EMU, who wanted off the YGT board. Though Brown did not immediately resign, he attended very few board meetings after Gousseff was elected.³¹ James Gousseff would soon become a very important member of the YGT board.

With new personnel in place, YGT prepared to reap the benefits of the support previously pledged by AHEPA. The Greek organization held an international convention in Toronto in late August 1964. A delegation, made up of YGT board members Clara Owens, Steven Spilos, Teddy Farres, and Nicholas Georges, went to the convention with a proposal that each member of AHEPA pledge ten dollars in support of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. AHEPA did not consent to this proposal but did agree to permit YGT to solicit all of its local chapters for donations. In addition, the Daughters of Penelope, the women's auxiliary of AHEPA, agreed to ask each of its members to make a ten-dollar pledge. Responsibility for securing the funds was to be at the chapter level – the money to be raised by whatever means the chapter desired. YGT officers considered this a great triumph. The two organizations had a combined membership of over forty-five thousand.³² An *Ann Arbor News* headline boasted, "Ypsilanti Theatre May Get \$1 Million." Unfortunately, YGT would receive very little money from AHEPA.

The trip to Toronto is interesting, however, in what it reveals about Clara Owens'

³¹ Gousseff interview.

³² "2 AHEPA Groups Pledge Greek Theatre Support," *Ypsilanti Press*, 22 August 1964.

possessiveness of the Greek Theatre project. Owens and Farres stayed together in the same hotel room while attending the convention. Teddy Farres belonged to the Daughters of Penelope and some members called to ask her to lunch one day to socialize and explain the Greek Theatre plans. Owens answered the telephone but never told Farres about the invitation. Instead, she met the women herself, giving them no reason for Farres' absence. Later, Farres found herself in the awkward position of trying to explain why she had failed to meet her conferees:

I said I didn't hear anything about the luncheon, but they said, "Clara Owens came and we asked for you.' And I said, 'Well, whatever [Clara] had to say was OK, because I would have said the same thing.' That was an inkling to tell you, [Clara] felt, 'I don't need anybody.' . . . It was bitter, very bitter.³³

September brought another crisis over the theatre site in Riverside Park. City Manager W. Robert Semple proposed a \$1.2 million urban renewal project for a large section of downtown Ypsilanti, including Riverside Park. The proposal involved locating the theatre opposite Pearl Street, the southern-most of the three sites recommended by Johnson, Johnson, and Roy. Under this plan, federal money could be obtained to raze older buildings in disrepair and redevelop the land with apartment towers, offices, and shops. Semple was careful to stress that buildings of historic significance would be preserved. Moving the theatre site would bring it closer to the central business district and Semple suggested an open, terraced plaza as an entryway into the theatre complex and the park. Semple was convinced that the plan "would provide a proper setting for the theatre and at the same time be a shot in the arm for downtown businesses." Another

³³ Farres interview.

major advantage was that this would eliminate arguments over the removal of the Ladies Library. City council reacted favorably, authorizing a feasibility study of the project.³⁴

This plan did not take YGT completely by surprise. Semple had approached Clara Owens and a few other members of the board with the idea in July, but they had informally rejected the suggestion of moving the theatre site. Semple's public proposal came at an awkward time for YGT. They were in the midst of an international search for an architect. Owens claimed that all seventeen of the candidates had seen the park and preferred the northern-most site. YGT immediately issued a strong statement to the press signed by Owens, Spilos, and Farres. They protested that "it would be folly to roadblock, and possibly thereby destroy, a going concern . . . simply to allow considerably more tentative projects of indeterminate merit to catch up."³⁵

When interviewed, city and urban renewal officials explained that, while the razing of most buildings in the project area could not begin for approximately eighteen months, it was certainly possible to buy or condemn the few buildings needed to clear the way for a theatre building at the Pearl Street site. The Greek Theatre need not be delayed by this new plan. The YGT statement made clear, however, that Owens believed the proposal was a deliberate attack on the Greek Theatre.

[YGT is] deeply concerned that certain special interest groups seem to be exerting undue influence upon some members of the City Council and city officials to block plans to create a classical theatre festival here by 1966.

The latest among many manifestations of this subtle pressure is the arbitrary decision reached by council Monday night to launch a study of the downtown area that includes relocating our planned theatre.

³⁴ "City to Study New Downtown Plans," *Ypsilanti Press*, 15 September 1964.

³⁵ "Greek Theatre Officers 'Deplore' Site Shift Idea," *Ypsilanti Press*, 16 September 1964.

We commend and support the council's concern with central business district development, but we deplore the breach of faith with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre implicit in the council's proposal. The council has for more than a year, and on numerous occasions, supported locating the theatre centrally in Riverside Park

[Fundraising] has been accomplished despite continuing harassment in the form of overt and covert pressures for delay We feel that further delay in relocating the planned theatre to fit an urban renewal scheme would be inimical to the best interest of the Greek Theatre and the people of Ypsilanti.

We are willing to cooperate and to compromise. But it must be pointed out that the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre is a going concern.³⁶

The following day YGT issued a second statement. It was a great deal less paranoid and somewhat more conciliatory. They recast much of their original argument in this new tone. To this, YGT added that, "We respectfully submit that not all of the three sites may be acceptable from a theatrical design standpoint." They argued that the complexity of theatre design required that site location and secondary design considerations, such as terraced plazas, be made subordinate to major design solutions. Furthermore, YGT could identify no compelling increase in economic benefits to the city by moving the theatre two to three hundred feet closer to the business district. The statement urged city council to follow the recommendation of the Johnson, Johnson, and Roy report that the architect be allowed to choose among the sites. It was on this basis that prospective architects were being interviewed. In conclusion, Owens and company professed, somewhat disingenuously, to having "no preconceived ideas about the theatre site. We trust the judgment of the architects and the consultants – highly competent professionals – completely."³⁷

However, at the first annual meeting of YGT that very evening, the urban renewal

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Greek Theatre Clarifies Project Plan Opposition," *Ypsilanti Press*, 17 September

proposal was, once again, the topic of bitter public statement. Vice President Spilos accused city council of ‘tampering with the success of the theatre.’ At the same meeting, Clara Owens was re-elected president and several new directors were elected. Among these were: Marvin Felheim, a dynamic and popular professor of English at the University of Michigan; Ted Rancont, Jr., drama critic for the *Ann Arbor News*; and surprisingly, considering recent conflicts, the Chair of the City Historical Committee, Richard Skinner.³⁸

A financial statement was also made public at this time. Only \$22,000 of the nearly \$120,000 in pledges had been collected. That amount combined with other gifts, loans, and charter memberships brought the total funds available to just over \$33,000. However, disbursements over \$30,000 left the organization with only \$2,372 cash-on-hand.³⁹

A few days later, YGT announced that they had hired Harry Weese and Associates of Chicago as the architects for their new theatre. Preliminary plans called for the theatre to be based on the Greek Hellenistic form with a fifteen hundred to two thousand-seat semi-circular auditorium, fully enclosed and air-conditioned, facing an open stage. Workshops, administrative space, storage, and an intimate two hundred and fifty-seat proscenium theatre were also to be part of the complex. Weese had designed the recently completed Arena Stage in Washington DC and a twenty-two hundred-seat theatre in the Milwaukee Center for the Performing Arts, as well as other smaller theatres

1964.

³⁸ “Greek Theatre Chooses Directors, Gets Reports,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 18 September 1964.

³⁹ “First Annual Report of the Board of Directors, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc.” 17 September 1964, Farres papers.

in Orlando, Florida and Portland, Oregon.⁴⁰ The *Ypsilanti Press* characterized Weese as “without question one of the leading architects in the entire United States, and probably in the world.”⁴¹

Clara Owens was succeeding in her goal to hire professionals who were in the top of their fields. Next on her list was the hiring of an artistic director of the highest caliber. There was a committee of board members assigned to this task. Among others, it included Owens and James Gousseff.⁴² The choice was narrowed to three men when Owens decided to arrange and attend a meeting in Paris between Weese and her favorite candidate, Alexis Solomos.⁴³

Solomos had recently walked away from fourteen years as the artistic director of the Greek National Theatre to form his own Athenian company, *Veakis Proskenion*. He was an acknowledged expert on classical Greek theatre and had published several books including, *The Living Aristophanes*. Solomos had credits as an accomplished actor, designer, translator, and critic, as well as a director. He studied drama in Athens, London, and at Yale University. He had worked in the United States before, as artistic director for the Cherry Lane Theatre in 1947 and for the Provincetown Playhouse in New York City in 1948. Solomos also spent time as a professor of drama at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and the National Dramatic School in Athens.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ “Noted Architect Chosen for Greek Theatre Plans,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 21 September 1964.

⁴¹ “Choice of Architect Major Step Toward Theatre Goal,” editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 23 September 1964.

⁴² Gousseff interview.

⁴³ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴⁴ “Greek Director Hired By Theatre,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 9 December 1964.



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Alexis Solomos and his wife, Kitty, arrived in Paris by train. Solomos met with Owens for a couple of days talking about the artistic possibilities of the project and then Weese arrived from Bombay. Weese, Owens, and Solomos met several times for lengthy meetings, poring over the floor plans for the proposed theatre that they had spread across the top of the grand piano in Owens' hotel suite. Owens was pleased with the meetings. She sent word home to Teddy Farres and her family that, "Weese and Alexis got along just beautifully. It was certainly worthwhile to get together. The little things about Greek Theatre were interesting. Solomos brought pictures and maps."⁴⁵

Money was a concern, however, and Clara Owens' initial offer was not enough for Solomos.

I am sorry that I could not offer Solomos enough money. I offered him \$25,000 a year for two years and to re-negotiate the contract for the third year. He makes more at home. He has his summer job and now the winter repertory – also his wife is director of music at one of the big radio stations. They have two children, 10 and 12. He wants to come next fall and put his children in school and stay for the year.

He was most helpful and really wants to come, so does she. I just don't know what is expected. He is *the* top man. The more we talked to him the more I was sure he is what we want. He is not bound by the past – but he knows it.⁴⁶

Owens had her man and was determined to hire him despite the high cost. Back in the United States, she told the search committee she had promised Solomos the job if they could come up with the requisite money. The contract was negotiated and Solomos agreed to come for two years at \$35,000 a year with an option on a third year.⁴⁷ This was in spite of the fact that the search committee had discovered that "the finest of Broadway

⁴⁵ Owens to Teddy, John, and Evans Farres, Farres papers.

⁴⁶ Ibid (emphasis in original).

⁴⁷ "YGT Expenses for First Year," Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

directors could have been hired for about one fifth of his salary.”⁴⁸

In December 1964, Solomos signed a two-year contract set to begin in September 1965. He was to teach a special course at Eastern Michigan University that fall while preparing a 1966 summer season of Greek theatre. This contract would have a serious impact on YGT.

Suddenly, there was a tremendous amount of pressure to open the first season of the Greek Theatre by the summer of 1966. Significant amounts of money were being spent on the services of an artistic director. Several members of the YGT board believe this pressure forced them into a disastrous decision to proceed with a season before the organization had the necessary funding and publicity in place.⁴⁹

Board members who were fans of the soft-spoken artistic director, as well as those who were not, agreed that the timing of Owens’ hiring of Solomos was unfortunate: “The decision to go in ‘66, no matter what, was partly precipitated by Clara walking in the door with an [artistic director] in tow and we knew we had a fat salary to take care of there.”⁵⁰

We got swept into a thing that it had to happen because Alexis was here and, because he was the greatest director in the world, it simply had to happen. My better judgment kept saying, ‘Not this year – a year from now it needs to happen.’ And there just wasn’t the opportunity to have it a year from now. Everybody said, ‘If we don’t do it now, it will never happen and Alexis will go back [to Greece].’⁵¹

After the hiring of Solomos, money became the most pressing need of YGT.

⁴⁸ Gousseff interview.

⁴⁹ Farres interview; Gousseff interview; Aziz (Zeke) Jabbour, telephone interview by author, tape recording, 15 July 1998; Rumelhart interview.

⁵⁰ Gousseff interview.

⁵¹ Rumelhart interview.

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Owens was frustrated with the progress of the local fund drive. The campaign had already run on past several scheduled completion dates. October 1 was only the most recent one. Jesse Mangas, an old friend of Owens from the Ypsilanti Players, had been hired as YGT's office coordinator in August 1964.⁵² Writing from Paris in November 1964, Owens told Farres, "I guess Jesse and I are going to reorganize the fund drive and I will be responsible. If I can get the office taking other duties, then I will concentrate on money alone. *Someone* has to. We are at dead center."⁵³ It is not clear whether Owens followed through with this plan; John Calder remained at least the nominal chair of the campaign in all subsequent newspaper accounts.

YGT was delaying the start of a national fundraising campaign until the completion of the local drive. It was believed that evidence of a strong commitment at the local level was needed to garner any support at the national level. The slow pace towards their \$200,000 goal was stalling the entire effort to expand the drive, although some overtures were made in a few selected Michigan communities.⁵⁴

Flint, Michigan boasted its own Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Committee, headed by Stewart Mott, son of philanthropist, C.S. Mott. The Flint committee was organized in October 1964. In December, they sponsored a benefit banquet for nearly one hundred fifty people. The event brought one thousand dollars into YGT coffers.⁵⁵ Stewart Mott's own money doubled that contribution.⁵⁶

Organizational efforts were underway in Lansing and Grand Rapids, Michigan as

⁵² "Mangas to Handle Theatre Fund Drive," *Ypsilanti Press* 13 August 1964.

⁵³ Owens to Teddy, John, and Evans (emphasis in original).

⁵⁴ "Area-Wide Group to Aid Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 4 December 1964.

⁵⁵ "\$1,000 Given to Greek Theatre Fund," *Flint Journal*, 6 December 1964.

⁵⁶ "Theatre Donors Announced," *Ypsilanti Press*, 16 November 1964.

well and special efforts were made to stimulate interest in YGT in Ann Arbor. A number of board members were from Ann Arbor, the YGT women's committee had an Ann Arbor division, and, in November 1964, YGT issued over one thousand invitations for an Ann Arbor reception. Owens and Calder spoke. Owens gave the audience an overview of the Greek Theatre project, including details of Weese's preliminary plans for the theatre building. Calder sketched the progress of the fund drive to date. He also took care to stress that the YGT would "not be in conflict with the Ann Arbor theatres 'The more theatre conscious the public becomes the better it will be for all of us,' he asserted." Attendees at the reception were told of various parts of YGT's plans, including ideas for the permanent building.⁵⁷

The preliminary designs delineated by Weese called for a round structure embedded in the side of the valley bluff, creating both street level and park level entrances. The plans effectively eliminated the central site, leaving just the one at the foot of Washtenaw Avenue and the other at the foot of Pearl Street under consideration. Weese stated that the sites were of equal value and identified advantages and disadvantages to both. He believed the choice of site was best made at the local level.⁵⁸ City council scheduled a study meeting in early December 1964, announcing publicly that they were disappointed by the failure of both Johnson, Johnson, and Roy and Weese and Associates to recommend a single site.⁵⁹ The meeting however was postponed indefinitely because Weese was unable to attend.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ "Ann Arbor Residents Asked to Aid Greek Theatre Cause," *Ypsilanti Press*, 11 November 1964.

⁵⁸ "Area-Wide Group."

⁵⁹ "Greek Theatre Site Clarification Sought," *Ann Arbor News*, 8 December 1964.

⁶⁰ "Theatre Conference Postponed," *Ypsilanti Press*, 10 December 1964.

Finally, in early January 1965, Howard Hershberger, Weese's project manager, explained in detail the specific advantages and disadvantages of both sites to the YGT board of directors. He told them that, because there was no firm commitment that the total redevelopment program for the Pearl Street site could be completed in timely fashion, his preference was for the Washtenaw Avenue site. Hershberger reminded the board that timing was critical if they hoped to have a theatre building for a 1966 opening season. Board member Thomas Yeotis told the group about "the laborious and drawn-out efforts to proceed with Urban Renewal" which he had experienced while working on a project in Flint, Michigan. A vote was called and fifteen of the nineteen directors present endorsed the Washtenaw Avenue site.⁶¹

The next evening, Hershberger spoke to a large gathering of civic leaders, including members of the YGT board, Ypsilanti City Council, Industrial Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Planning Commission, City Historical Committee, Ypsilanti Historical Society, and the mayor and city manager. Hershberger told the group that, while both sites were equally suitable for the proposed theatre structure, the Washtenaw Avenue site could be developed at a substantially lower cost to the city. The costs of building acquisitions and removals needed immediately to make the Pearl Street site usable would exceed \$100,000 and further removals and improvements that would be required within a short time might run into millions of dollars. In contrast, Hershberger explained, the Washtenaw site required only the removal of the Ladies Library, already owned by the city. Demolition would cost only a few thousand dollars. Hershberger told the gathering that the old library was sound enough to move, but that the estimated

⁶¹ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 7 January 1965, Farres papers.

\$70,000 it would cost to do so might be prohibitive.⁶²

Hershberger was convincing and an informal agreement was reached with YGT on the Washtenaw site. Despite the agreement, Dr. William Edmunds, president of Project 73, was reluctant to give the Ladies Library to the Greek Theatre. “[The] priority of the theatre is preeminent . . . [but] can’t we have both? . . . Once you start removing these century buildings, where do you stop? We must start to preserve somewhere along the line.”⁶³ Two more requests would be made for the Ladies Library to be converted into a city museum. City council remained undecided. Finally, on 6 April 1965, the Ypsilanti City Council formally approved the Washtenaw site.⁶⁴ It would not be until July 1965 that they approved a draft of the lease on the park.⁶⁵

The YGT board had been working on sponsoring a “Greek Week” in Ypsilanti schools to generate some publicity. The Royal Greek Embassy in Washington DC provided some materials. YGT managed to interest State Senator, George S. Fitzgerald of Grosse Pointe Park, in the event. He sponsored a resolution, which passed, making the week of February 1 - 7, 1965 a state-wide “Greek Week.”⁶⁶ The event garnered some useful publicity for YGT and more state-wide press coverage came when Michigan AHEPA chapters named Clara Owens, “Greek Woman of the Year.”⁶⁷

An announcement of the hiring of Tom Patterson as a consultant to YGT was deliberately timed to coincide with “Greek Week.” A decision had been made in January

⁶² “Greek Theatre Site Understanding Reached,” *Ann Arbor News*, 9 January 1965; “Greek Theatre Location is Recommended,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 9 January 1965.

⁶³ “Greek Theatre Location is Recommended.”

⁶⁴ “City Oks Theatre Location,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 7 April 1965.

⁶⁵ “Theatre Lease Eyed,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 13 July 1965.

⁶⁶ “Greek Week Now State-Wide,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 February 1965.

⁶⁷ “Mrs. Owens Acclaimed ‘Greek Woman Of Year,’” *Ann Arbor News*, 3 February 1965.

by the board to hire Patterson for a minimum of five days at one hundred dollars per day.⁶⁸ Patterson's primary duties were to help with the national fundraising campaign. James Brown, Jr.'s editorial in the *Ypsilanti Press* enthusiastically approved this move by YGT. He believed the presence of Patterson would lend legitimacy to YGT's foundation appeals, as would Weese's presence on the project.⁶⁹

Patterson's presence, however, produced few tangible results. He may have had numerous valuable contacts, including a few in New York, but most of his contacts were Canadian. YGT was approaching American and Greek foundations and philanthropists not Canadian ones.⁷⁰ Even Patterson's staunchest allies had to concede he was more suited to selling a dream than raising money to make it a reality. Stratford's first production manager, Cecil Clarke, had found Patterson's fundraising efforts to be pitiful. In a letter to Tanya Moiseiwitsch, he complained,

Tom is a sweet chap and [my wife] and I are very fond of him but as a general manager he's pretty hopeless – a dreamer with no idea how to make his dreams practical realities. I have to force him to answer letters. Usually I write them myself and get him to sign them.⁷¹

Patterson's one hundred dollars per day was not a good investment for YGT, though, not long after his hiring, the local fundraising campaign finally hit its \$200,000 goal. The way was clear to solicit funds outside of the local area. That same day, the first wire service story about the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was written by Associated Press

⁶⁸ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 7 January 1965.

⁶⁹ "Hiring of Tom Patterson Big Boost to Theatre Drive," editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 10 February, 1965.

⁷⁰ Patterson's success at Stratford was with selling the idea of a Canadian Shakespeare Festival. When serious fundraising was required, Patterson failed to produce, frustrating Stratford Festival organizers. Eventually, he was asked to step down from his position of General Manager.

⁷¹ Clarke to Moiseiwitsch, quoted in Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:52.

writer Phil Thomas and published throughout Michigan, the United States, Greece and other European countries.⁷² National publicity, however, did not translate into national enthusiasm for YGT and the Greek Theatre's ambitious fundraising goals were never realized.

In April 1965, YGT made public Weese's final plans for the theatre building (Figures 7 – 9). It was a unique design with a modern tent-like exterior enclosing a classically influenced seating plan. It is interesting that Stratford's permanent building was also designed to resemble a tent, though Weese made no mention of any influence from that quarter when he described his reasons for the design. "The Greeks never enclosed a theatre,' Weese explained. 'So I had to guess what they would have done if they had wanted to enclose one. A tent seemed the obvious answer. This is a steel and concrete tent placed atop a classical Greek theatre.'"⁷³ Actually, the roof of terra cotta panels supported by high tension steel cables was more reminiscent of a *velarium* than any tent. A *velarium* was a canopy of linen and cotton used in many ancient Roman structures including the Coliseum in Rome.

Weese believed there would be many advantages to this unique roof. The 210-foot diameter roof was to be

. . . supported only at the farthest possible points of the structure, so that from the interior it appears to float without visible support.

To enhance the 'Feeling of sky' thus created the architect has specified an inner ceiling made of a heavy, beaded plastic fabric that will soar in folded convolutions across the top of the auditorium interior. All of the theatre's stage lighting is to be mounted on catwalks and platforms above the ceiling fabric.

Construction of the startling roof system is to be accomplished in stages The first stage is the stringing of the steel cables from a central 'scene building' to a huge steel ring around the circumference of the main

⁷² "Ypsi Greek Theatre Gets World Publicity," *Ypsilanti Press*, 24 February 1965.

⁷³ "Greek Theatre Building To Be Unique," *Ann Arbor News*, 15 April 1965.

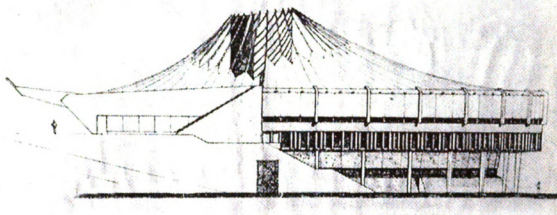


Figure 7 – Weese Design for YGT: Exterior View

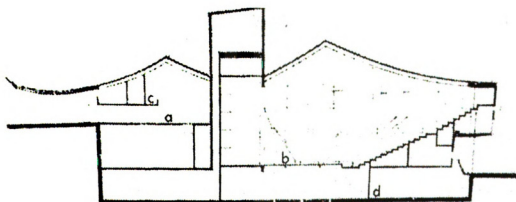


Figure 8 – Weese Design for YGT: Section View



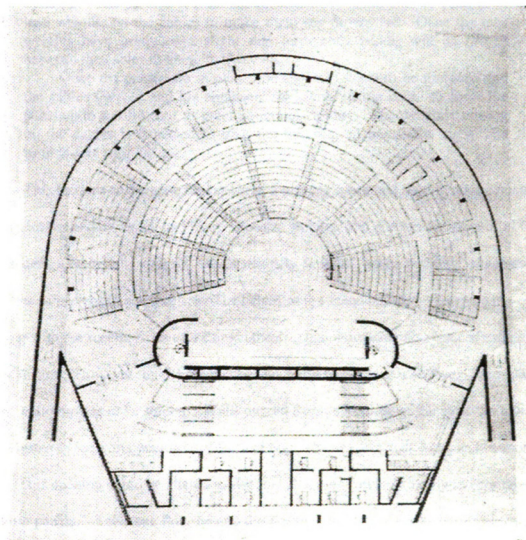


Figure 9 – Weese Design: Groundplan View

building. The second will be the placement of thousands of pounds of lead weights on the cables to make them sag downward. Once the lead weights have produced a slight sag, terra cotta panels will be placed between the cables to about halfway up.

Once the panels are in place, the lead weights will be removed and the cables (Weese and his engineers say) will 'spring back' to force the panels into a solid roof of great structural rigidity. The dynamic tension on the cables is expected to give the building an unusually 'tight' and trouble-free roof.⁷⁴

This modern suspension roof covered a playing space and seating arrangement heavily influenced by Greek and Roman theatre architecture. Cables for the roof of the Weese design were to be attached to a nearly fifty-foot tall "scene building" suggestive of the *skene* of ancient Greek theatres. The height of the scene building was more in keeping with the *scaena frons* of a Roman theatre than the analogous *skene* of a classical Greek theatre. However, unlike the niched and statuary-laden *scaena frons*, the surface of this building was to be smooth. Walls curved from either side of the structure towards the *orquestra* to form an opening fifty-six feet high, seventy-two feet wide, and twenty feet deep. This opening could be altered in size and shape by "architecturally integrated masking panels." The stage floor behind the opening was built on a hydraulic elevator. The height of the scene building allowed for a counterweighted fly system by which painted drops and other scenery could be raised and lowered. It also contained rigging for cranes to be used for those entrances of gods from on high that are called for in so many Greek plays. Floor sockets and rigging provisions were made for *periaktoi*, three-sided painted scenery that pivoted on a central axis.⁷⁵ *Periaktoi* were an innovation of the Hellenistic theatre.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Untitled speech, Patterson Papers, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre File, Stratford Festival Archives (hereafter cited as Patterson papers, Stratford Festival Archives).

The scene building was designed to be used

. . . as anything from a blank wall to a complete and detailed set. It [would be] possible to use rear projection effects on a screen across its front or to open up the entire structure adding its depth to the depth of the 'orchestra' playing area.⁷⁶

A forestage, comparable to *proskenion* of the classical Greek theatre, the *logeion* of Hellenistic Greek theatres, and the *pulpitum* of the Roman theatres, jutted out from the scene building. It, too, was built on a hydraulic elevator. Its dimensions were approximately fifty-two feet long by sixteen feet deep.⁷⁷

The circular *orquestra* was to be approximately forty-four feet in diameter. It was trapped and the combination of the *orquestra* and *proskenion* stages contained the axes for three large tilting turntables.⁷⁸ Actors could enter this major playing space a number of ways. They could enter from the scene building. There were also entrances, or *paradoi*, on either side of the scene building. *Paradoi* are a feature of the earliest extant Greek theatre, the Theatre of Dionysus on the Acropolis. Other approaches to the *orquestra* included two tunnel-like corridors known as *vomitoria* leading from dressing rooms under the main auditorium. Additional passageways led from the dressing rooms to the scene building and the *paradoi*. The *vomitoria* and passageways are a decidedly Roman construct. *Vomitoria* were never a part of classical or Hellenistic Greek theatre architecture.

Scenery and costume shops were located eighteen feet below the stage and main auditorium. The hydraulic elevators of the *orquestra* could be lowered to the shop level

⁷⁶ "Greek Theatre Building To Be Unique."

⁷⁷ Untitled speech, Patterson papers, Stratford Festival Archives.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

but access was through a passageway that would have severely limited the size of scenery travelling through it. Had the theatre been built, this surely would have created a huge inconvenience for scene designers and technicians.⁷⁹

The auditorium closely resembled those engineered by the ancient Greeks. Weese claimed that “modern techniques could improve very little on the Greeks in this department.”⁸⁰ Weese modeled the rake of the auditorium on the ancient theatres in Athens and at Epidaurus. This meant that the 1,900 seats would be more steeply tiered than was typical for modern proscenium theatres. Seating was to wrap around the circular *orquestra* a few degrees beyond a true semi-circle. This feature was imitative of Greek theatres. The seats themselves were not to be the traditional folding-type, but rather would be formed by armrests protruding from the backs of upholstered benches.⁸¹

Approximately two-thirds of the way up the house ran a wide cross-aisle, analogous to a *diazoma*, a feature of the earliest classical Greek theatre on the slopes of the Acropolis and many other Greek and Roman theatres. The *diazoma* provided easy access to side aisles going up and down to any seat. Furthermore, tracks for curtains were rigged above the aisle, allowing the upper bank of seats to be closed off from the rest of the auditorium. This cut the seating capacity of the theatre to approximately 900 seats. The tracks were incorporated into the design with smaller community events in the Festival off-season in mind. *Vomitoria* led off the *diazoma* to an “intermission gallery.”⁸²

The entrance lobby was quite small for a theatre with a 1,900-seat capacity. This was a deliberate design decision on Weese’s part because the lobby was supplemented by

⁷⁹ George Bird, interview by author, tape recording, Ypsilanti, MI, 6 July 1999.

⁸⁰ “Greek Theatre Building To Be Unique.”

⁸¹ Untitled speech, Patterson papers, Stratford Festival Archives.

⁸² “Greek Theatre Building To Be Unique.”

an intermission gallery, where patrons could “promenade between acts.”⁸³ The gallery wrapped around three-quarters of the circumference of the building. The exterior wall of the gallery was sheathed in glass, providing a panoramic view of Riverside Park and the Huron River. The gallery was designed to be easily adaptable to art exhibits and other community events. The combination of the entrance lobby with the intermission gallery created, according to Weese, “more useable lobby space than most theatres of comparable size.”⁸⁴

Underneath the entrance lobby, Weese placed a 200-seat flexible theatre. It was intended to be used as a rehearsal hall for the company during the season, as well as an additional venue for small Festival and community events. The small theatre could be arranged for either frontally-oriented or arena staging.⁸⁵

The unique nature of the Greek theatre resulted in a singular design by Harry Weese and Associates. On 1 May 1965, Ted Rancont, Jr., drama critic of the *Ann Arbor News* and YGT’s press agent, presented the design at the fifth annual United States Institute of Theatre Technology (USITT) conference at Indiana University. Russell Johnson, chairman of the conference, called the plans “the conversation piece of the conference Everyone was very much impressed with the boldness and artistic potential of the project. This is a theatre for which there is no modern precedent.”⁸⁶ There certainly were many features in the Weese design to please the conferees.⁸⁷

⁸³ “Greek Theatre Will Combine Modern with Ancient,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 17 April 1965.

⁸⁴ “Greek Theatre Building to Be Unique,”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Greek Theatre Draws Attention at Parley,” *Ann Arbor News*, 4 May 1965.

⁸⁷ It seems highly unlikely, however, that the theatre could have been built for the estimated three million dollars, particularly with the lavish amount of stage machinery involved such as trapped hydraulic elevators and large tilting turntables.

Two days before Rancont's presentation, G. A. Brakeley and Company, Incorporated, a professional fundraising firm from New York, presented their feasibility report to the full YGT board. The Brakeley firm had been hired by the board to perform "a feasibility and directional study to gauge national interest in and support for the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre and attempt to determine whether a fundraising program is desirable and feasible."⁸⁸

The report was generally positive but it did call attention to significant weaknesses within the YGT organization and to the immensity of the challenge it faced. The report highlighted the urgent need for high-powered fundraising leadership at a national level. It was developed through formal interviews with "board members, representatives of ethnic organizations, the theatrical profession and the performing arts, the Greek government, the Greek Orthodox Church and persons informed as to prevailing philanthropic patterns."⁸⁹ Two interesting names on this list of interviewees are Mrs. George Romney, wife of the governor of Michigan, and Roger Stevens, special assistant on the arts to President Johnson and soon to be chairman of a newly established National Endowment for the Arts.

The Brakeley study is important for two contrasting reasons. First, it provides an objective analysis of YGT at a crucial stage of its development. Secondly, excerpts from the various interviews are printed in an appendix to the report. They serve up a smorgasbord of subjective commentary about YGT.

The positive assessments supplied in these interviews vary little from YGT's own

⁸⁸ "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc. Feasibility and Directional Study," (New York: G.A. Brakeley, April 1965) 1, Farres papers (hereafter cited as Brakeley report).

⁸⁹ Ibid, 2.

promotional material. Some of the more negative comments indicate that not everyone interviewed had full confidence in YGT. Interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality, so the following excerpts are not attributed to specific sources.

The big question is will people pay professional theatre prices to see Greek Drama.

Can it – or should it ever be revived!

I am afraid that people in Detroit can't get too excited over what happens in Ypsilanti.

The site has one fault – it is too dangerously close to Ann Arbor.

I feel that the project has outgrown the Board of Directors.

There is no one connected with the program that could excite the attention of those people who are needed to organize nationally.

Don't expect too much from the Greek Organizations – they have their own pet projects.

The amount of money needed scares me.

No matter how you look at it – the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre will be in competition with the University of Michigan for the philanthropic dollar.

Raising money is difficult – raising it for a Ypsilanti Greek Theatre would seem impossible.⁹⁰

The objective portion of the analysis listed the favorable and unfavorable factors in the case for developing a classic Greek theatre in Ypsilanti and for fundraising for the project. The lists are extensive. The favorable factors for a classic Greek theatre center on the nature and origin of the plays: as the earliest source of Western drama and as products of the earliest democracy. Stress was also placed on the cultural, artistic and educational opportunities such a theatre could provide. The writers of the Brakeley report believed that the “presence of a highly competent and professional Greek theater would stimulate the speech and drama departments of [Eastern Michigan University, the University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and Michigan State University].”⁹¹

Further positive attributes of the project included its geographic location in the

⁹⁰ Brakeley report, Appendix B.

⁹¹ Brakeley report, 7.

center of the metropolitan area of southeastern Michigan and the beauty of the proposed building site. The successes of the Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and of the Stratford Festival in Ontario were taken as encouraging signs, and yet the unique nature of the Greek theatre meant there would be no directly analogous professional competition. The corporate support of the “big three” auto makers: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler Motors, led the writers to hope that support from other national corporations would be forthcoming.⁹²

These favorable factors were set against some negative ones. The report warned YGT that there was little exposure or understanding of the Greek theatre even among the culturally sophisticated citizens of the United States. It mentioned a critical shortage of qualified actors and directors for this type of theatre, as well as a shortage of playable translations. They felt that Ypsilanti as a location suffered from a “lack of focus.” It was too far from Detroit and too close to Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan, which had a competing professional theatre program in the Association of Producing Artists. Furthermore, YGT seemed to suffer from a lack of “short and long-range fiscal planning.” Finally, the authors of the Brakeley report believed that the name, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, was “not sufficiently attractive or provocative.”⁹³

The most critical, controversial, and cogent remarks made in the Brakeley report dealt with the prospective fundraising leadership of YGT. While they found the board of directors of YGT to be “respected and dedicated individuals” and their president to be a “guiding and dynamic force behind the program,” they found seven seriously unfavorable factors affecting the potential for fundraising at the national level.

⁹² Ibid, 8-9.

⁹³ Ibid, 9-11.

1. There is meager precedent for organized major gift solicitation of national scope by the volunteer leadership of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.

2. While respected and dedicated individuals are associated with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, the lack of representation on the Board by nationally known and affluent individuals will seriously hamper organization of a national fund-raising program.

3. The local composition of the Board of Directors' leadership may present a deterrent [*sic*] to securing interest and participation of top level national figures.

4. Those in a position to comment indicated that there is a lack of direct constructive communication within the Board of Directors and among its members and that decisions are occasionally arbitrary and/or dictatorial.

5. The present Ypsilanti Greek Theatre leadership does not fully appreciate 'art for art's sake' – (the Greek Theatre for culture). For the most part the Board is dedicated to the potential and beneficial economic effect this program could have on Ypsilanti. This appears as the initial and basic motivation.

6. Many top leaders in Ann Arbor and even in Ypsilanti have not been approached to participate in the volunteer structure of the organization.

7. The advantages of endorsements by the Universities of Michigan, Michigan State, Eastern Michigan and Wayne are not fully appreciated by some of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre leadership.⁹⁴

There is much in this list that could not have pleased Clara Owens. Item four directly comments on her leadership style as "arbitrary and dictatorial." The call for changing the composition of the board to include leaders of national stature threatened her desire for complete control over the project. This reluctance to relinquish control explains, in part, the failure to contact certain leaders referred to in item six. There were certain citizens of both Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti whom Owens was unwilling to approach because she believed they would threaten her control. Owens' attitude towards the leaders of Project 73 is a case in point.

The lack of focus on the artistic possibilities of the Greek Theatre by the board as described in item five may, at first, seem a minor consideration. However, it later turned

⁹⁴ Ibid, 11-13.



out to be huge difficulty as the summer of 1966 was winding down and YGT's artistic success had failed to translate into financial success.⁹⁵

In 1965, the YGT leadership was faced with numerous challenges that led the Brakeley Company to conclude that YGT and its board lacked "the leadership ability to raise anything like the amount of money required for its proposed program." These included the intense competition for the philanthropic dollar from other culturally-oriented causes, as well as religious and educational institutions; the limited financial substance of board members; a lack of potential large-gift prospects; the lack of serious interest in the project by AHEPA or wealthy Greek individuals; and a "general resistance on the part of most corporations to making substantial contributions to capital campaigns for culture." Furthermore, the Brakeley report warned,

Solicitations of major gifts take time – they usually average eight months from initial contact to contribution The contracts, legal commitments, promises and the timetable adopted by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre leadership sets a condition of urgency for immediate and successful fund raising.⁹⁶

This warning is one that strikes a chord with YGT interviewees. Many commented that, had they had it to do over again, they would have waited another year before they attempted a season in order to secure the funding and audience development that YGT so sorely needed.⁹⁷ There was fear, however, that momentum would be lost if the season was delayed. Even the Brakeley report warned about the dangers of appearing

⁹⁵ The board members who believed in the Greek theatre only as a business proposition and not as an artistic dream eventually withdrew their support. The defections were so rampant that it seemed to board member, Judy Riecker that "by August no one was there." Several board members abandoned YGT financially as well, failing to pay off substantial pledges.

⁹⁶ Brakeley report, 14-19.

⁹⁷ Farres interview; Gousseff interview; Jabbour interview; Tom Patterson, interview by author, tape recording, Stratford, Ontario, 12 August 1998; Rumelhart interview.

to be raising money for a promised – rather than an ongoing – program.⁹⁸ Above all, Alexis Solomos' large two-year contract set to begin in September 1965 was mandating a 1966 opening season. The decision made in December 1964 to sign Solomos precluded the delay recommended by the Brakeley report.

The Brakeley study concluded that YGT could succeed if it implemented several essential recommendations. YGT needed to hire a qualified and competent executive director as soon as possible. The board of directors should be expanded to include people of great potential to the national scope of the fundraising program. Furthermore, these people should be placed in key positions of responsibility. The focus of the fundraising program should change as well. The local fundraising program had been sold by describing what the YGT could do for Ypsilanti. The national program needed to sell the product by describing what YGT could do for the national cultural climate. Precise plans should be made in terms of immediate and long range financial needs as well as the artistic, building, educational, and administrative programs of YGT. Endorsements and support should immediately be sought from the four major area universities. The building site acquisition and a positive Internal Revenue Service ruling on a tax-exempt status should be expedited. Consideration should be given to changing the organization's name because "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre" might not be useful in a national appeal. A realistic timetable and schedule that was related to the development of national support should be adopted. Finally, a fundraising firm, such as Brakeley and Company, should be employed as soon as possible.⁹⁹

The *Ypsilanti Press* published a brief article about the Brakeley report on 30 April

⁹⁸ Brakeley report, 23.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 20-22.

1965. The article mentioned that the study had been submitted to the board of directors the night before, that the company had determined that the plan was feasible, and that they recommended that an executive director with a fundraising committee of national reputation be obtained immediately.¹⁰⁰ The next day, the *Ypsilanti Press* received an angry and anonymous letter to the editor. James Brown did not publish the letter; instead, he forwarded it to Clara Owens for comment. She refused to do so until she had met with her board and the letter, which follows, was placed on the agenda of the May 14 board meeting.

I believe it is the duty of the Ypsilanti Press [*sic*] to acquaint the people of Ypsilanti with the true facts about the 'Ypsilanti Greek Theater' project.

I believe the people of Ypsilanti should see the facts reported in the Blakeley [*sic*] Feasibility Report – This [*sic*] is the firm hired to investigate the possibilities of the Ypsilanti Greek Theater.

The sugar-coated news items printed in the Ypsilanti Press [*sic*] are quite different from the true facts in the report. The report points the incompetence [*sic*] of the present Board of Directors. It points out their lack of interest in 'Art and Culture'. They are selfishly seeking personal gain. It points out that the project must be dis-associated [*sic*] from Ypsilanti. The word 'Ypsilanti' must be dropped from the name of the project, and the supervision of the project must be placed in the hands of 'big city interest.'

The land given for this project belongs to the Tax-payers. They have a right to know the truth. It is the duty of the Ypsilanti Press [*sic*] – at this time – to print an accounting of all monies and pledges received by the Ypsilanti Greek Theater. Also, How [*sic*] much of these monies have been spent and what the money was spent for.

This project was advertised as a 'Civic Project' and people were pressured into pledging large sums of money. These people have a right to know where this money is going and what they are getting in return.

Mr. Editor, I urge you to read and study the Blakeley [*sic*] Feasibility Report. Each member of the Board of Directors has a copy. Then, instead of printing the sugar-coated nonsense [*sic*] prepared by a press agent, Print [*sic*] the truth. There's no reason for the present great secrecy. This is being financed with the people's money.

¹⁰⁰ "Theatre Plan Feasible," *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 May 1965.

*Because I am closely associated with this project, I can not identify myself at this time.

THANK YOU!¹⁰¹

The letter exaggerates the negative tone of the Brakeley report. It is highly likely, however, that the letter's author was a member of the YGT board, though none of the board members interviewed claimed, or even speculated as to its authorship. The Brakeley study was marked confidential, each copy was numbered, and they were distributed only to YGT's board. Unfortunately, there are no minutes available for the business meeting during which this letter was discussed.

There is some anecdotal evidence however, that the anonymous letter writer was not alone in his or her frustration with YGT's money-raising strategies. Future Greek Theatre chorus member, William Cross, found that

. . . a lot of people were alienated about the way they were asked for money

. . . . I heard rumors that a lot of people were *quite* offended with the sledgehammer kind of brutal tactics of fundraising and were insulted by it. And a lot of people said, 'O.K., damn it! Here! I'm writing you a check now, God damn it, leave me alone!' There was a lot of that I think – a kind of bitter feeling.¹⁰²

Another prospective contributor commented that

The thing that rubbed some of us the wrong way is that we were expected to contribute. Whether we wanted to or not was beside the point; we were expected to do it. It was a not very professional way of going about soliciting contributions for this highly speculative enterprise.¹⁰³

Tom Patterson expressed discomfort with the fundraising tactics of YGT too, particularly with Clara Owens' techniques. This discomfort became so profound that he

¹⁰¹ Anonymous letter attached to Clara to Directors, 11 May 1965, Farres papers (underlining, asterisk, and all-capitals in the original).

¹⁰² William Cross, interview by author, tape recording, Ann Arbor, MI, 17 July 1998.

¹⁰³ Bird interview.

would try to avoid bringing Owens along when he solicited funds for YGT.¹⁰⁴ He also resented the presence of the Brakeley Company. In April 1965, he wrote to Owens and asked for clarification of his responsibilities. He believed his purpose was fundraising, but he did not want George Brakeley to “get the big money,” while he was a “little recompensed figurehead.”¹⁰⁵

Newspaper accounts of the May 14 board meeting indicate some actions taken as a result of the Brakeley report. Steps were taken to amend YGT’s letters of incorporation to meet IRS requirements for tax-exempt status. By early July, they had received a favorable ruling. The board also voted to obtain an executive director and a national fundraising chairman as quickly as possible. The rest of the Brakeley report was tabled until the chairman had been selected. The ostensible rationale for this decision was that the chairman (whoever he might be) would have his own advice on the recommendations of the report.¹⁰⁶

It is evident, however, that the Brakeley report contained conclusions the YGT board was unwilling to accept. A document entitled, “Greek Theater Report, 1965” was prepared in response to the feasibility study. It is not clear exactly when, by whom, or for what audience the report was prepared, but it contains YGT’s official response to the Brakeley study. The document deals with the Brakeley report in a selective manner. Certain criticisms are accepted, others are rejected, and some are not even mentioned.

The response agreed that there should be a shift away from “what YGT can do for Ypsilanti” to “what YGT can do for the national cultural climate.” The need for short

¹⁰⁴ Patterson interview.

¹⁰⁵ Patterson to Owens, 21 April 1965, Patterson papers, Stratford Festival Archives.

¹⁰⁶ “Theatre Slates Public Meeting,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 15 May 1965; “YGT Gets Favorable Tax Ruling,” *Ann Arbor News*, 8 July 1965.

and long term planning was acknowledged, as were the difficulties with the location and the name of the project.

As to the Brakeley firm's charge that the local composition of the board of directors' leadership would be a detriment to national fundraising, the YGT report replied that the Brakeley firm,

. . . failed to take into the account the initiative, vision and imagination of those same local leaders. Yet the [Brakeley] report was silent on the 'how' of interesting [national] leaders Getting competent leadership for any type of project is virtually impossible unless it is achieved by a quirk of fate. National leaders who could be effective have self-interests and are constantly fending off groups such as the Greek Theater project.¹⁰⁷

The response argued that energy should not be wasted in such a fruitless search. Rather, strong local and regional support should be sought. Furthermore, "the Greek Theater board must welcome this support Misunderstanding and lack of comprehension until now has been the only deterrent [*sic*] to such a unification of effort." The approach to the Greek community had been "misjudged" and should focus more on "what the Greek Theatre could do for Greek-Americans and Greece itself." The report concluded that, "The job at hand now is fund raising from a regional approach, the 1966 Festival, and the review and implementation of a masterplan. To concentrate on any other aspect will take away the chances of success of any one of the three."¹⁰⁸

Choosing to hear only what it wanted to hear, YGT resumed its double-time march towards a 1966 season. They did not give up hope of a national fundraising campaign immediately. By the end of May, they announced the hiring of Tom Patterson as executive director for the festival. Earlier, as a paid consultant, Patterson had made

¹⁰⁷ "Greek Theater Report, 1965," Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Collection, Eastern Michigan University Archives (hereafter cited as YGT collection, EMU Archives).

¹⁰⁸ "Greek Theater Report, 1965," 12-16.

trips to New York and to Athens on behalf of YGT. In Athens, he had met with the Greek film star, Melina Mercouri, and obtained a verbal commitment from her (which never materialized) to perform in the 1966 festival season.¹⁰⁹ Patterson told the press that his first task as executive director would be to select a chairman for the national fundraising campaign. "I am positive I will have someone in a month or two."¹¹⁰

A public meeting was held 3 June 1965 in which YGT announced a four million-dollar fund drive. The treasurer's report made at that same meeting is striking evidence of just how unprepared YGT was for the immensity of such a task. Cash-on-hand totaled less than \$2,300. Only \$52,000 of the original \$200,000 in pledges had actually been collected. Some of the rest of the money was in pledges spread over yearly payments of up to three years and \$59,000 of it was in "letters of intent" to be paid at a future date. Even more ominous were the nearly \$5,000 worth of cancelled or non-current pledges.¹¹¹

The month or two Patterson needed to find a fundraising chairperson stretched to three and then four. By the second annual meeting on 30 September 1965, Patterson still had not produced a fundraising chair or any significant donations to YGT. Various board members told the public assembly that lack of money had the project at a crisis point, while Patterson commented that there was "some value in having the theatre project in the 'panic stage,'" because excitement would build under pressure.¹¹² This observation must have been incredibly annoying to board members already frustrated by Patterson's lack of progress.

¹⁰⁹ Patterson interview. Although Patterson recollects travelling to Athens on behalf of YGT, there is no evidence in the financial data that YGT ever paid for such a trip.

¹¹⁰ "Greek Theatre Ready to Launch \$4-Million Drive," *Ypsilanti Press*, 4 June 1965.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² "Greek Theatre Slates Crash Program to Get National Fund Drive Going," *Ypsilanti Press*, 1 October 1965.

By the end of October, Patterson was no longer executive director of YGT. Clara Owens claimed she fired him; Tom Patterson claims to have quit; and the official statement to the press claimed that the decision was “mutually agreed upon.”¹¹³ Looking back on the incident over a year later, Owens wrote,

We felt we were very lucky to find Tom Patterson . . . very available He came on a contract of 6 month intervals, the first 6 months to be spent in national fund raising. Tom is a very nice person, charming in many ways, [but] his heart is still in Stratford. We found at the end of three months that nothing was happening, no money was coming in, no prospects, and that TP was an alcoholic [*sic*].¹¹⁴

On 23 October 1965, Owens sent Patterson his final paycheck accompanied by this letter:

The Executive Board of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre at a recent meeting, expressed great concern over your conduct the night of October 18.

You have deliberately not reported for work since October 18, and have not carried out any of the assignments made to you previous to that date. It has been necessary to employ others to carry out your duties.

For these reasons we must regard your contract as terminated by you on October 18¹¹⁵

This letter certainly piques curiosity over the events of the evening of October 18 but no other reference to an untoward incident has been found and Patterson has no comment.

Patterson, for his part, blames his lack of success on Clara Owens. He maintains that he was not given sufficient time to build up a relationship with wealthy and prestigious donors. He had connections with Mrs. Edsel Ford through her interest in the Stratford Festival, but he asserts that he was embarrassed to take Owens to see Ford.

¹¹³ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; Patterson interview; “Patterson Leaves Theatre Post,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 28 October 1965.

¹¹⁴ Owens to Wes [Vivian?].

¹¹⁵ Owens to Patterson, 23 October 1965, Patterson papers, Stratford Festival Archives.

Patterson also recalls an incident in which Owens spotted him in an Ypsilanti bank soliciting funds for YGT from the manager. Owens called Patterson into the YGT office and accused him of trading on YGT's name to obtain a personal loan. In a 1998 interview, Patterson, accused Owens of having "a problem with booze." This statement could very easily be unreliable because it is clear that Patterson came to harbor a high degree of antipathy for Clara Owens. In the same interview, he complained that "she had an ego, you wouldn't believe it She was awful, really."¹¹⁶

The summer and autumn of 1965 were not without some glimmers of hope for raising funds. In July, Stewart Mott, then chairman of the Flint committee of the YGT, pledged to match all 1965 contributions generated from the Flint area up to \$10,000.¹¹⁷ That same month, Clara Owens traveled to Washington DC in search of federal aid for the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. She met with the Michigan delegations in the House and the Senate.¹¹⁸ In September, the House prepared to debate the act, which had already been passed by the Senate, establishing the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities. Michigan Congressman Wes Vivian stood in the well of the House and told his colleagues that one of the first projects that should be considered under the new act was the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.¹¹⁹

Once the act was passed, YGT moved quickly to prepare a grant proposal. An unfortunate circumstance, however, made it highly unlikely their proposal would succeed. Roger Stevens had been appointed the director of the National Council on the Arts, which was to control the federal grants. Stevens had been an honorary member of

¹¹⁶ Patterson interview.

¹¹⁷ "Stewart Mott to Match \$10,000 in Theatre Funds," *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 July 1965.

¹¹⁸ "Greek Official Visits Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 July 1965.

¹¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, House, 89th Cong., 1 sess., 9 September 1965.

YGT's board of directors since early 1965. He had held very little responsibility in this position, though Patterson had met with him at least once, seeking advice on fundraising for YGT.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, some Republican congressmen argued that Stevens should avoid any appearance of conflict of interest by refusing to consider grants for organizations that he had led. Stevens replied in a news conference "I am perfectly willing to declare unequivocally that no organization with which I have an affiliation will be entitled to funds from any government program with which I am associated."¹²¹ Thus, the potentially fortuitous timing, that YGT would be developing an arts project with ambitions of attaining national significance just as a federal endowment to support such projects was created, was nullified.

Alexis Solomos and his family arrived in New York aboard the ocean liner *Queen Elizabeth* on 7 September 1965. His arrival generated a *New York Times* article on the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Solomos told the *Times* that he hoped to "present Greek tragedy not as something out of a museum but as something live. I hope it will get into the blood of the American theatergoing public."¹²² Two days later, Solomos gave a morning news conference in Ypsilanti. He told the assemblage that his dream was to "make this the universal center of Greek drama" where "guest companies from the entire world would perform as well as the repertoire company to be organized here." He also outlined his plans for the upcoming year. He would teach at Eastern Michigan University for the fall term only, at the same time making contacts with college students who potentially could be chorus members. Most of the performers would be professionals

¹²⁰ Patterson to Owens, 21 April 1965.

¹²¹ "Greek Theatre to Apply for Grant Under New Act," *Ypsilanti Press*, 11 October 1965.

¹²² "Ypsilanti Plans a Greek Theater," *New York Times*, 9 September 1965.

however, and he planned to travel to New York for major auditions in November. In the meanwhile, he would search for stage-worthy English translations of the plays. He would also work closely with the architects on final plans and working drawings. A special meeting with the architects was scheduled for September 16.¹²³

Solomos was beginning to learn, however, that the promises made by Clara Owens in Paris in 1964 were nowhere close to becoming reality in Ypsilanti in 1965. The evening after that first news conference, Solomos was introduced to the board in a meeting where Tom Patterson gave a report on the budget and the status of fundraising. After the report, there followed “a lengthy discussion” on the bare feasibility of a Festival season in 1966.¹²⁴

Solomos had expected that the theatre would at least be under construction when he arrived and that money would be in place for a 1966 season. According to Judy Rumelhart, a board member who became a good friend of Alexis Solomos,

. . . he was very frustrated. . . . When he came here, he was told there was a theatre he was going to have that was his theatre. He could have the pick of American actors and actresses to teach and be a part of the theatre and, of course, there wasn't. He arrived here . . . and he was pretty much terrified because he'd sort of walked away from being the Aristophanes specialist of Greece He kept saying, 'What do we do? What do we do? I don't know what we are going to do!' . . . [Owens] was so excited about [YGT] she got Alexis here too early. If she had said, 'A year from now we'll have the theatre, but I want you to teach at EMU for a year,' then he would have had that choice to make. But he didn't have that choice.¹²⁵

Just before he left Ypsilanti, Tom Patterson spoke to Solomos and “gathered he was more

¹²³ “Solomos Combines Role as Professor and Director of Greek Theatre,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 9 September 1965.

¹²⁴ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 9 September 1965, Farres papers.

¹²⁵ Rumelhart interview.

worried than ever. I feel also that he does not really think the project is going to go ahead.”¹²⁶

The political situation in Greece in 1965 made it difficult for Solomos to walk away from the unprepared and under-funded Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. The government of Prime Minister George Papandreou was embroiled in controversy. Scandal also swirled around the military. Political and social order was destabilizing and this would eventually lead to a military coup in April 1967.¹²⁷ It was a good time for the Solomos family to live outside of Greece. With little other choice, Solomos decided to stay and try to make the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre work.

On September 16, there was a day-long meeting between Solomos, Weese and his associates, and YGT set designer, Eldon Elder. It is not clear whose idea it was to hire Mr. Elder to design the festival sets. It may have been Solomos', Owens', or even Weese's. Eldon Elder was already a prominent designer with seventeen major Broadway and six off-Broadway productions to his credit. He had festival experience as well. Elder designed costumes and lighting for productions of the American Shakespeare Festival, the St. Louis Municipal Opera, New York's City Center, and the New York Shakespeare Festival.¹²⁸

The evening of September 16, after receiving assurances from Weese that, if foundation work could be started by December, workman could have a structure ready,

¹²⁶ Patterson to John O'Brien, 23 November 1965, Patterson papers, Stratford Festival Archives.

¹²⁷ Taki Theodoracopulos, *The Greek Upheaval: Kings, Demagogues and Bayonets* (New York: Caratzas, 1978) 129-162.

¹²⁸ "Press Information: June 28 and 29, 1966," YGT collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

the YGT board voted to set opening night as 23 June 1966.¹²⁹ At the second annual meeting of YGT, board members tried to communicate the pressing need for fundraising. Board member Steve Spilos was blunt, “Up to now we have been play acting. Now the play must go onWe’re past the green stage. Right now is the time for all to perform. Go out and ask for money.” YGT vice-president Thor Marsh told the crowd that to meet the opening day deadline the organization was faced with three options and that money would largely determine the choice. They could have a completed building by opening night; they could perform in a building only partially ready; or they could use a temporary location.¹³⁰

At the same meeting, the YGT board of directors was enlarged to twenty-five members and a slate of twelve new directors was elected. Clara Owens had some concerns about this election. She wrote to Tom Patterson in August 1965,

Things are at somewhat of a standstill now until after our Annual meeting with the election of new directors and officers. I suppose they will elect me again. They haven’t anyone else yet. I am doing a little finagling . . . I found a small group here wanted to elect certain people as directors . . . so I found that we had voted at one time to accept absentee ballots, this was couched in general terms, so I am sending ballots to all the voting membership, and I shall ask them to return them, and if they don’t care to make a selection, they may sign the ballot and I will fill in the presidential choice. I may pick up some votes for the guys I want that way. By concentrating their vote on three directors, a handful of townspeople could elect the three.¹³¹

It is not clear who “the three” were who worried Owens, or whether they were among the slate of twelve. Nonetheless, this kind of suspicion and subterfuge seems to be typical of Owens’ leadership of YGT. Three names of note, however, were among the

¹²⁹ “June Theatre Opening Set; Building Details Discussed,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 17 September 1965.

¹³⁰ “Greek Theatre Slates Crash Program.”

¹³¹ “Owens to Tom and Pat [Patterson], 28 August 1965, Patterson papers, Stratford

new board members. They were Joseph Nederlander, Detroit theatre magnate; Carl R. Anderson, newly appointed Vice-President at Eastern Michigan University; and John Mayhew, one of Henry Ford's vice-presidents and the person who would eventually replace Clara Owens at the helm of YGT.

Solomos' choice of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Aristophanes' *The Birds* was approved by the board at the business meeting which immediately followed the annual meeting. A third play was still intended for the 1966 season. It was to be a "modern play inspired by a Greek theme." From the beginning, there were questions about Solomos' choice of plays. Stewart Mott urged that Sophocles be considered, "if for any reason the original choice of plays was not fruitful."¹³² *The Birds* was an especially puzzling choice given the topicality of *Lysistrata* in these days of the Vietnam war and of *The Clouds* in an area surrounded by many major universities.

Owens used this business meeting to scold her board for not bringing in enough money. She exhorted each board member to assume his or her share of the workload. If the present board could not produce, she threatened, "we need new board members and an entirely new staff."¹³³ At the next board meeting on October 14, Owens tried to shake up the board membership but was foiled, as the majority of the board held that "the middle of a campaign was a poor time to make any changes as it would hurt the project locally."¹³⁴

Two months later, at the final board meeting of 1965, a "Plan of Action" for the

Archives (ellipses in original).

¹³² Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 30 September 1965, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 14 October 1965, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

1966 season was approved. It included an operating budget of \$795,000 divided in the following manner:

Table 1 – Proposed Operating Budget 1966

Talent	\$287,000.00
Technical Staff	69,300.00
Production Supplies and Equipment	74,200.00
Festival Administration	105,200.00
Administrative Supplies and Equipment	150,100.00
Capital Investment	70,000.00
Miscellaneous and Contingency	39,200.00
Total	\$795,000.00

Assuming an audience averaging seventy percent of capacity, ticket sales were expected to raise \$403,000 of this total. Concession income was estimated at \$17,000. This left \$375,000 to be raised at the local, regional, and national level.¹³⁵

Note that a theatre building is not included in the proposed budget. Owens and her board were finally forced to abandon that part of the plan, for the 1966 season at least. December had arrived and the building's foundations had not been laid. It was hoped that a successful season would bring in the donors required to make the Weese design a reality for the following year. In the meanwhile, the board decided that a tent was "practical, exciting and a necessary temporary medium."¹³⁶

On December 20, Ypsilanti City Council's liaison with YGT, Ernest B. Therkelsen, brought a surprising proposal before the council. YGT had concerns about placing a tent in Riverside Park. What could they do about dressing rooms for the actors

¹³⁵ "Plan of Action," Farres papers.

¹³⁶ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 9 December 1965, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

as well as sewer, water, and toilet facilities for both employees and the public? There were also concerns over whether the lease arrangement with the city would be open to taxpayer suit. Councilman Therkelsen's solution caught his fellow city leaders off guard. He suggested that the city build the theatre as a civic center and then lease it to the Greek Theatre. Therkelsen stressed that the design already incorporated many features, such as the small theatre, the gallery, the curtain track above the *diazoma*, and several meeting rooms, which would easily suit a civic center. Therkelsen's idea "drew mostly negative reactions from other councilmen," and was never acted upon.¹³⁷

Between January 1964 and December 1965, Clara Owens and the YGT accomplished a great deal but the organization's future remained uncertain. They conducted a successful \$200,000 local fund drive but the bulk of that amount was in pledges rather than cash. Furthermore, a feasibility study commissioned by YGT questioned the ability of the organization to raise further funds at the national level. YGT hired a nationally recognized architect and elaborate plans for a new theatre building were approved but then abandoned for lack of funds, while the proposed location of the theatre plant continued to cause controversy within the community. In the fall of 1965, Alexis Solomos was enticed by a large salary to come from Greece to lead the theatre as its artistic director but, upon his arrival, he found YGT unprepared to mount a 1966 season. As 1965 came to a close, opening night was less than six months away. The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre had little more than an ambitious plan and a somewhat panicked artistic director. Their cash-on-hand was a meager \$2041.¹³⁸ Yet, they managed to

¹³⁷ "Councilman Proposes that City Build Greek Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 21 December 1965.

¹³⁸ "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc., Statement of Receipts and Disbursements for the Month of November, 1965," Farres papers.

create a 1966 season that was praised internationally as an artistic success.

Unfortunately, on their route to this artistic victory, they laid the path to their financial defeat.

CHAPTER THREE

YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE: 1966 PRE-SEASON PREPARATIONS

“CHILDREN! GOD’S HERE!”

The first quarter of 1966 was an extremely active period for the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Records of the activity are scant, however, until the month of March. Yet, before that blustery month ended, Clara Owens had lost her hold on her beloved Greek Theatre. Some would say she lost her hold on reality as well.

Project 73 tried, once again, to preserve the Ladies Library. On January 17, they requested that city council provide them with a “notice of intent” and 180 days to explore means of preserving the building. There was some thought that, perhaps, the building could be moved. The council members, especially Councilman Therkelsen, were reluctant to make any motion that could interfere with the Greek Theatre. They resolved only to give Project 73 “as much notice as possible.”¹

In the meanwhile, Owens was arranging for Stephen Porter of the Milwaukee Repertory Company to direct the third play. A meeting between Porter and the steering committee was first set for February 7 and then postponed until February 14.² It is not clear whether Porter ever came to Ypsilanti. No report of the visit was recorded in board minutes or newspaper articles. A number of titles for the third play were discussed at this time. These included Maxwell Anderson’s *Winterset*, Robert Sherwood’s *Acropolis*, and

¹ Council Proceedings, 17 January 1966.

² Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 3 February 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; Owens to Porter, 8 February 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of

Eugene O'Neill's, *The Great God Brown*.³

Five new members were elected to the board of directors at the February 3 meeting. They included William Hein, manager of the *Ypsilanti Press*; two local bank executives; and two other people who would be of great importance to YGT, Judy Riecker and Zeke Jabbour.⁴ Riecker and Jabbour had been convinced to join YGT by Marvin Felheim, YGT board member and classics professor at the University of Michigan.⁵

Judy Riecker was a young Ann Arbor socialite with a strong interest in theatre, especially musical theatre. Her family was quite wealthy. She was a Towsley (a wealthy Ann Arbor family) on her father's side and a Dow (Dow Chemical Company, Midland, Michigan) on her mother's side. Here was somebody who, if she did not yet have much wealth of her own, at least had the kind of contacts that the Brakeley report stressed as being so important to fundraising. It was not long before the twenty-six year old mother of two small boys was chairman of the YGT Development Committee.

Zeke Jabbour was an architect who owned his own construction company in Ann Arbor. He was on the board of the Association of Producing Artists at the University of Michigan as well as several other theatre boards. It was Jabbour and his company that would eventually convert the Eastern Michigan University baseball stadium into a Greek theatre with lightning speed. Jabbour nearly went bankrupt in the process.⁶

James Gousseff was the board member in charge of the committee interviewing

Michigan.

³ "The Third Play," Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴ YGT minutes, 3 February 1966.

⁵ Rumelhart interview (Ms. Rumelhart has since remarried. In 1966, her last name was Riecker).

⁶ Jabbour interview.

candidates for the position of business manager. At the February 3 board meeting, Gousseff reported his progress and recommended Richard Kirschner for the position.

Gousseff remembers Kirschner's interview "vividly,"

. . . because – we said – ‘Well, how would you publicize?’ [Kirschner] started ticking off a list of things, half of which we'd not thought of. We were these largely business men sitting around saying, ‘Oh God, oh wow, he's our boy.’ I'd talked to him enough to recognize that he knew about theatre, but they bought him on the basis of his knowledge of publicity.⁷

Owens remembered the interview process a bit differently. “. . . [A]fter some pretty horrible interviews, we agreed that Richard Kirschner was the best of the lot. He had had a great deal of experience, but was not on the overall [*sic*], which we later, and not much later discovered.”⁸ Owens and Kirschner would come into conflict with one another almost immediately.

Richard Kirschner brought a great deal of experience to the job, especially with summer theatre festivals. Immediately prior to accepting the YGT post, he was assistant director of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, a consultant to the Ithaca, New York theatre festival, and a lecturer at Columbia University. He had worked in various capacities with the Front Street Theatre of Memphis and the Phoenix and Lincoln Center theatres in New York. From 1955 to 1962, Kirschner was with the American Shakespeare Festival and Academy at Stratford, Connecticut, serving as their educational director, director of the student audience program, administrator of the Academy, and assistant to the executive vice-president. He was a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin theatre program.⁹

Perhaps one of the reasons that Owens and Kirschner could not get along was that

⁷ Gousseff interview.

⁸ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁹ “Press Release,” Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 7 March 1966, Owens papers, Bentley

their personalities clashed so strongly. Zeke Jabbour explains it this way. “Kirschner did have a big ego, but Clara had an even bigger one I think. So we were dealing with some giant egos. That was very difficult.”¹⁰ Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart describes Kirschner as

. . . very dramatic . . . like the drag queen in *La Cage Aux Folles* with a heart full of everything and an absolutely round head, a round body, bald with dark black glasses . . . He was bigger than life. The first time I went to visit him at the Annenburg Theatre . . . he said ‘Come on, I have to show you my theatre.’ And he walked in and said, ‘Children! God’s here!’ And I just roared. He was really good at what he did. He was just flamboyant.¹¹

Kirschner traveled to Ypsilanti on February 5 to meet with the board and assess the situation. By the March 9 board meeting, when his contract was ratified by the board, Kirschner had determined that YGT needed to have at least \$300,000 in cash-on-hand by March 21 to make a 1966 season practicable. Much of YGT’s money was in pledges. Pledges were no help at all in securing contracts and setting up the necessary Equity and IRS escrow accounts. Kirschner believed that, unless this kind of work could begin by March 21, it would be impossible to mount a first-class festival. He made it clear to the board that he was only interested in producing a first-class festival.¹²

Kirschner intimated that YGT had already lost “some very important people because of the delay.”¹³ It is not apparent exactly to whom he was referring, although efforts to lure talent without definite plans in place and money in hand had always been a problem for YGT. Melina Mercouri and Christopher Plummer are examples of two

Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁰ Jabbour interview.

¹¹ Rumelhart interview.

¹² Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 9 March 1966, Farres papers.

¹³ Ibid.



prominent actors lost to the board's inability to act.¹⁴

The financial situation was grim but not without hope. Judy Riecker's mother, Margaret Towsley, had agreed to anonymously loan YGT \$100,000, if it could be matched by \$200,000. As of March 9, Kirschner calculated that YGT had \$75,000, leaving \$125,000 to raise in just twelve days.¹⁵

During the month of March 1966, two major threads to the YGT story spin out somewhat independently of one another. The first thread is the account of how this large sum of money was raised in such a short time. The second is the story of Clara Owens' rapidly disintegrating relationship with Kirschner and the YGT board. The events behind this disintegration are complicated and woven into a myriad of other important incidents.

At the March 9 board meeting, Kirschner dropped the \$300,000 bombshell and discussion turned to what YGT could do to raise such a sum. Councilman Therkelsen offered to look into a loan from the city's Capital Improvement Fund. This was the third time he offered city funds, to no avail, in nearly as many months.¹⁶ Clara Owens asked each of the directors present to sign a pledge to give, loan, or acquire by gift or loan, the sum of \$5,000 and told them each director who signed "would be called every day and reminded of this commitment."¹⁷ Whether in spite of, or because of Owens' imperious manner of soliciting the pledge, thirteen out of the fourteen members present signed it. The lone holdout was Richard Skinner, a member of the YGT board since September 1964. Of course, the hastily typewritten page was easy to sign. Delivering on the pledge would be difficult for many members of the board who were of modest means. There is

¹⁴ YGT minutes, 9 December 1965.

¹⁵ YGT minutes, 9 March 1965.

¹⁶ Council Proceedings, December 1965 – March 1966.

¹⁷ YGT minutes, 9 March 1965.

no record of how many board members were willing or able to follow through.¹⁸

The board decided to ask the *Ypsilanti Press* for help with an editorial appeal to the community. The *Ypsilanti Press* cooperated admirably. On Saturday, 12 March 1966, a news story describing the Greek Theatre crisis was published next to an editorial urging the community to contribute. Under the editorial, a small coupon was printed, which readers could cut out and send in to the *Ypsilanti Press* along with their checks. The newspaper published the coupon on page one of every edition from March 12 through March 21. The *Ypsilanti Press* agreed to hold all funds in escrow until the deadline. If not enough money was raised, they promised to return the checks.¹⁹

Some progress had been made towards raising the \$300,000 Richard Kirschner had deemed necessary to launch a 1966 season. Between March 9 and March 12 the YGT board collected enough money to bring their approximately \$75,000 to \$83,000. Margaret Towsley's \$100,000 loan, added to the \$83,000, brought the balance needed by YGT to \$117,000. The Greek Theatre needed to raise this amount in only nine days. Both the *Ypsilanti Press* article and editorial stressed the need for cash. Readers with outstanding pledges were urged to pay them off in advance. The potential economic benefits to the city were a major part of this last-minute appeal. The hopeful references to Stratford, Ontario's economic successes were published once again.²⁰

At the March 16 meeting of the YGT steering committee, it was reported that \$4,600 had been raised since the newspaper campaign began. Larger sums were announced from a number of sources: a \$10,000 gift from the McGregor Fund to finance

¹⁸ Untitled pledge, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁹ "Greek Theatre at Crisis; Next 9 Days to Decide Fate," *Ypsilanti Press*, 12 March 1966; "YOU Can Save Festival!" editorial, *Ypsilanti Press* 12 March 1966.

²⁰ Ibid.

the student matinees, a \$20,000 gift from the *Ypsilanti Press*, and \$5,000 from the Chrysler Corporation. With nearly \$40,000 towards their goal, the committee prepared to meet with city business leaders at a special Chamber of Commerce meeting the following afternoon.²¹

Nearly forty business men and women attended the meeting. Several of them wrote checks that afternoon. Many who did were paying in advance on pledges they had already made. A representative of the General Motors Corporation paid off their pledge early by presenting Clara Owens a check for \$25,000. The *Ypsilanti Press* fund was nearing \$6,000. A report of YGT's major expenditures to date was made. The potential economic benefits to the community were itemized for the business leaders. The festival was compared to an "industry of major proportions." A new kind of appeal was made as well, an appeal to community pride. Dr. Bradley Harris, president of the Chamber and Owens' old nemesis, closed the meeting with this statement. "'This is the face of Ypsilanti. This project can't die. This is as important to us as any industrial development. The potential is unique. It can't fail.'"²²

On Saturday, March 16, a week after the campaign started and just two days before it had to end, the *Ypsilanti Press* published another editorial entitled, "\$67,921 Left to Raise – Can We Afford to Fail?" The editorial is an impassioned plea, indicative of the tremendous support James Brown, Jr. and his paper gave to YGT. In it, Brown addresses some of the criticisms of the Greek Theatre and appeals to the pride of the community. For all these reasons, the editorial is worth quoting at some length.

. . . by Monday \$67,921 must be raised It is not impossible.

²¹ Minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 16 March 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

²² "Final Efforts Made to Save Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 18 March 1966.

That so much has been given in so short a time is tremendous. If, however, the goal is to be reached every single individual in this community whether or not they believe in what the festival can mean MUST write a check and put it in the mail tonight

As you know, the original 'seed' money drive to raise \$200,000 in pledges was a success. Many people have asked what happened to the \$200,000 it was pledged money not cash. The theatre actually has received \$136,786 in cash from its inception till March 1, including loans totaling approximately \$26,000.

It has spent \$111,410, including repayment of all but \$12,000 of the loans, and had \$25,376 in bank, including \$13,000 in escrow at that date.

The major items of expense were architect's fees \$26,207; salaries for professional theatre personnel, \$35,775, and professional fund raising and counseling services \$41,372.

Some may ask, why did they hire an architect? It is easy to say now this decision was wrong. Yet the theatre board was trying to sell an idea; the only material things it had to show – and it desperately needed something – were the architectural plans of the new theatre and an artistic director.

You may argue with hiring a director a full year before production was scheduled. Yet entirely aside from whether one was needed so early (and we believe he was), his presence was a major factor in many of the outside gifts which were received.

Why so much for professional fund raising? Why was money spent on trips to Chicago and New York?

How do you even try to obtain foundation gifts for a \$2,000,000 theatre unless you go out and ask for help? How do you conduct a nationwide campaign among foundations, government agencies and so on without professional help?

The drive was unsuccessful – so it's easy now to fault those earlier decisions. But it seems to us really valid criticism of the theatre would have come if it had not made those efforts

That original drive, remember, was for 'seed' money. How are you going to sow seed if you don't go out in the field!

We do believe a major mistake was made – by both the board and the community at large. That was the basic concept two and a half years ago that we could go out and, in effect, get something for nothing.

We thought we could contribute a few dollars as a community and some big foundation or the Greek national organizations would rush to our door to give us the real money.

It just didn't work out that way

Even beyond this, however, one of the most significant features in getting a festival into production this summer, it seems to us, is the simple question of community pride.

Will the Greek theatre draw?

We don't know for sure and neither do you, or anyone else for

that matter.

But that really doesn't make any difference now.

If we put on a production and it isn't successful – though heaven knows we are convinced it will be – so what!

There is no shame in having tried and failed. There is in fact community prestige just in the fact of trying.

But if we let this whole concept go down the drain without ever a play having gone on stage . . . ? That will be a deep and dismal failure.

It will be a blow to civic spirit from which the community and other community projects will be years recovering.

For decades no one will know what the Greek Theatre really might have meant, what it really might have done, what we really might have gained in national stature.

We will have a name all right – in state and nation – but it won't stir a reaction we're proud of.

Whether you believe in the Greek Theatre dream or not – can YOU, as a citizen, risk this?

We don't think so. Forget the past. Forget your complaints and doubts. The decision is being made now on the future.

A thousand or more people should visit the post office tonight and mail in their check.

You be the one who starts it!²³

On Tuesday, 22 March 1966, a banner headline, "Oh, What a Beautiful Day – The Greek Theatre Is Go!" splashed across the front page of the *Ypsilanti Press*. The Greek Theatre drive had not quite reached its goal but, with a bit of fudging and finagling, they were close enough. The actual total on hand was \$286,663. Margaret Towsley accepted the amount in the belief that late contributions would meet the remaining \$13,367 needed.

The banner headline almost did not make it to press, however. It was the afternoon of March 21 and everything was in place. Mrs. Towsley had agreed to make the loan when, at the last minute, someone else's offer of a \$48,000 loan was withdrawn. YGT went back to Margaret Towsley and, according to the *Ypsilanti Press*, "the stories

²³ "\$67,921 Left to Raise – Can We Afford to Fail?" editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 19 March 1966 [The last two sets of ellipses are in the original].

of personal sacrifice made by so many so impressed the person who offered the \$100,000 loan [Towsley] that it was increased to \$150,000. At the same time, it was announced that the matching requirements were considered met.”²⁴ Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart phrases it a bit more bluntly, “I just went and conned my mother out of most of the money we needed.”²⁵

Still, the breakneck fund drive was an impressive accomplishment. The *Ypsilanti Press* Festival Fund reached nearly \$21,000. Over \$90,000 of the grand total raised came from relatively small contributions. These included a business man who walked into the *Ypsilanti Press* offices and said, “I don’t like the idea of the Greek Theatre and I don’t think it will go over, but here’s my check for \$150.” A group of 102 second-graders gave the festival \$23. Professors from Eastern Michigan University and University of Michigan made loans and gifts. The *Ypsilanti Press* estimated that somewhere between 700 and 1000 individuals gave money to YGT that frantic final week.²⁶

The evening of March 21, the YGT board voted to go ahead with the 1966 festival season, but it was a board in turmoil. The general public had been unaware of the internal divisions within the YGT as the \$300,000 fund drive pressed towards its successful conclusion. Nevertheless, there was a deep and growing rift between Clara Owens and the rest of the YGT leadership.

The first indication of this rift was Clara Owens’ resignation as president of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre at the March 9 board meeting. Immediately after she coerced board members into signing that \$5,000 pledge, she resigned and announced that John

²⁴ “Oh, What a Beautiful Day – The Greek Theatre Is Go!” *Ypsilanti Press*, 22 March 1966.

²⁵ Rumelhart interview.

²⁶ “Greek Theatre Is Go!”

Mayhew would be the new president of YGT. Owens left the meeting. The board then created a new position for her as Chairman of the Board of Directors as a kind of consolation prize. It was a largely honorary position with no power. Owens did, however, remain an active member of the board.²⁷

According to Clara Owens, her resignation was an action she undertook quite willingly.

[Kirschner] said we needed \$300,000 to start and I agreed. So we started a drive. When we were pretty sure that we would make it, I resigned as President I was physically exhausted I did not see how I could immediately start the rush for the season, and I had paid little attention to my husband for two years. The week before I resigned I put in 80 hours at the office or meetings.²⁸

This statement does not quite fit the facts, however. There is little doubt that Owens was working long hard hours, but she resigned three days before the new drive was even made public. Another clue as to her reasons for resigning comes from a letter written in 1967. When Owens was exploring ways to revive the theatre, she wrote to a friend and speculated as to why “the moneyed people in Ypsilanti” had never contributed to YGT. “I thought for a while, because Brad Harris said so, that I was unacceptable to the moneyed interests I really thought, since they made it so obvious that they wanted another President besides Clara, that they might get behind the idea. I was wrong.”²⁹

Other board members remember events differently. They recall asking Owens to step down. According to James Gousseff,

²⁷ YGT minutes, 9 March 1965.

²⁸ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (ellipses in the original).

²⁹ Owens to Peter Fletcher, 25 January 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

It seemed to me that the most important single thing . . . to do was to support the professionals It was the reason that the board asked Clara to move from president to chairman because she was interfering with the operation *a lot*. She was constantly in the office, giving Kirschner just a terrible time, questioning his every decision. So the board conspired to ask her to change positions.³⁰

Zeke Jabbour remembers that

when we were going to ask Clara to become chairman – to step down as president – nobody wanted to make the motion We felt that something had to be done, but who was going to be the bad guy?

. . . I know it was unanimous among the board members that something had to be done. Otherwise, the festival couldn't survive She, uh – I'm not sure she was a totally balanced person because there were explosions. People don't normally explode. But she felt a great deal of loss; that something that was important to her was being taken away from her . . . Nobody really wanted her off the scene. They just wanted her to relinquish control to the professionals as they came in.³¹

These recollections of the sequence of events include a contradiction just as Owens' recollection does. Owens' interference with Kirschner is cited as the main reason for removing her from power, but Kirschner's contract was not ratified until the very meeting in which Clara Owens stepped down. There is quite a bit of evidence of conflict between Owens and Kirschner after March 9. Perhaps the board members are recalling these events. Another possible explanation is that incidents occurred for which we have no record between Kirschner's arrival on February 5 and the meeting on March 9. Perhaps Dr. Bradley Harris and others convinced Owens that the organization could raise more money without her. It is clear, however, that some sort of maneuvering had occurred behind the scenes before the board meeting, because Owens stepped down politely and knew in advance who the board would vote to replace her.

John Mayhew was chosen as YGT's new president for several reasons. As a

³⁰ Gousseff interview.

³¹ Jabbour interview.

vice-president of the Ford Motor Company, he certainly had the necessary administrative capabilities. He had been instrumental in raising money from Ford and had otherwise been active in and helpful to the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Perhaps most importantly though, he brought no ego problems with him. He is described as a gentle man who never raised his voice.³²

Once Clara Owens stepped down, she began to fight nearly every action taken by Kirschner and the YGT board. During the month of March, something happened nearly every day to upset her. Consequently, it is best to describe the events on a day-by-day basis.

March 9. At the board meeting, Richard Kirschner's contract was approved. He announced the need for \$300,000 in cash by March 21 and left the meeting. Zeke Jabbour reported that he and Solomos had been looking into the possibility of using the Eastern Michigan University baseball stadium, instead of a tent in Riverside Park, as a temporary site for the festival. Solomos credited "a midnight conversation with Dr. Bradley Harris" for the inspiration to use the baseball stadium as a theatre.³³ There were several advantages to the stadium site, all of which would save YGT money. The stadium was "well laid out," the audience area was already covered and the stage area could also be covered, lighting and acoustics would be better than in a tent, and the costs of terracing and running sewer, water, and electric utilities associated with the park site would be eliminated or greatly reduced. Furthermore, EMU was embarking on an ambitious building program, which called for the elimination of the field within two years, so the university would likely be willing to entertain the Greek Theatre proposal.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Solomos' Farewell Lauds Effort of Town, Cast," *Ypsilanti Press*, 1 August 1966.

The board minutes record “a great deal of discussion regarding this and Mrs. Owens pointed out the fact that we do not want a low grade festival . . . and only as a last resort should the baseball stadium be considered.”³⁴

A few fundraising measures were discussed and then Owens resigned as president and left the meeting. Discussion returned to the possibility of using the baseball stadium. The board decided to pursue the matter and make inquiries as to the stadium's availability, despite Owens' earlier objections.³⁵

Kirschner returned to the meeting. His temporary absence and return raise the question; was he waiting for Owens to leave? Kirschner asked that the board consider shortening the name of the festival to The Ypsilanti Festival or The Michigan Festival. He believed a shorter name would be advantageous; the minutes do not specify in what way. John Mayhew stated he felt it would be important to retain the word Ypsilanti in the title. The board agreed and voted to change the name to The Ypsilanti Festival.³⁶

March 10. The decision to change the name was reported in the *Ypsilanti Press*. Kirschner told the paper the “decision to call the repertory theatre project a ‘festival’ is because it is to embody far more than classical Greek theatre.” In the 1967 season, Kirschner hoped to include, “chamber music, vocal recitals, dance concerts, athletic events, symposiums, concerts, theatre arts and exhibits of antiquities.”³⁷

March 11. Alexis Solomos, alarmed by what he read in the paper, wrote to John Mayhew, the newly elected president of YGT.

I take this opportunity, dear Mr. Mayhew, to express . . . my surprise for the change of the Festival's name, of which I was informed by the

³⁴ YGT minutes, 9 March 1966.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “Greek Theatre Renamed ‘Festival,’” *Ypsilanti Press*, 10 March 1966.

newspapers. My decision to come here as artistic director of this Festival, was influenced to a great extent by its being dedicated to Greek Drama. I hope therefore, that the decision is not final – or that a sub-title, mentioning the *classic* Greek character of the Festival, will always be attached to the main title.³⁸

The bulk of the Solomos letter deals with his concern over delays caused by YGT's financial uncertainty. "From November, 1965, when we began our contacts in New York until today, much was gained in so far as the forming of the theatrical company is concerned – and much was lost by our inevitable delay." Solomos warned Mayhew that the production schedule he had presented the board in February was essentially negated by these delays. Solomos felt that he was more than a month behind schedule. He was willing to switch to an "emergency rhythm of work," but could not guarantee the patience or availability of other members of the company. Solomos continued,

I ought, perhaps, to mention to you that so far, most of the leading actors who were approached, either showed no interest whatever about a project which had not adequately been publicized, or were tired of waiting for our o.k. and accepted other engagements. Of course, the Festival could be realized by talented actors of second magnitude; but this solution . . . would be pernicious to a new and completely unknown Festival.³⁹

In addition to not having leading actors, Solomos was concerned about "losing our collaborators in music and choreography – who have been waiting for almost six months," and "being still undecided as to the *place* and *shape* of our temporary theatre." He concluded, "only when the Board of Directors will tell me formally and officially that the Festival *can* and *will* take place, only then I shall be able to figure out *when* and *how*

³⁸ Solomos to Mayhew, 11 March 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (emphasis in the original).

³⁹ Ibid.

it can start.”⁴⁰

On the evening of March 11, Richard Kirschner and Clara Owens attended a meeting of the Women’s Committee of the Greek Festival. The committee had been officially formed in late 1965. It was a very active and well-organized arm of the YGT. Its operations included organizing a speaker’s bureau to promote YGT, recruiting volunteer office workers, making educational kits for school children, providing hospitality for various YGT events, and raising money through a variety of promotional events. These included events such as benefit concerts, tag sales, home tours, and bake sales. The committee rarely raised any large sums at these affairs, but the sheer volume of events produced a steady stream of income into YGT coffers.

This particular meeting of the women’s committee is unremarkable except for one piece of old business that must have made Richard Kirschner shudder a bit. A motion was made that a silk screen be purchased so that posters for the festival could be hand made. Kirschner hastened to inform the committee that a professional graphics designer had been hired to do this work. He also told them that all requests for printed material must be cleared through him first. The motion was withdrawn.⁴¹ A minor incident, certainly, but it does highlight the fact that almost everyone associated with YGT, up until this point, was almost completely unaware of professional theatre practice.

March 12. The *Ypsilanti Press* published the article and editorial that launched the \$300,000 fund drive.

March 13. Alexis Solomos left for New York City to conduct eighteen hours of interviews and auditions in a three-day period. Seventy-two actors and actresses

⁴⁰ Ibid (emphasis in the original).

⁴¹ Minutes of the Women’s Committee of the Greek Festival,” 11 March 1966, Owens

appeared before him in fifteen-minute time slots. He also planned to meet with designers and costumers and visit fabric houses.⁴²

March 16. The Steering Committee of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre met. Eugene Calder and Joseph Butcko, members of the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce, were present. They announced that three hundred-sixty invitations to the meeting scheduled for the next day had been sent out to their mailing list. Butcko cautioned the board that their membership would “expect a good account of the money received and what had been done with it.” After it was suggested that board members Owens, Marsh, Jabbour, and Riecker attend the Chamber meeting, Calder warned the group that the presentation needed to be made on a “very business-like basis.”⁴³

There is no proof, of course, but Clara Owens may have been a large part of Eugene Calder’s concern that a less than business-like approach would be made. Owens’ delivery style was at times like that of a “fluttery clubwoman.”⁴⁴ Teddy Farres complains that Owens had a propensity to make presentations that were more about her own accomplishments than about YGT.⁴⁵ Owens’ speeches, at least those recorded in annual reports to the membership of YGT, tend to be a bit florid. One interviewee described her speaking style as rapid, high-pitched, and affected.⁴⁶ Zeke Jabbour found that business people and community leaders were reluctant to meet with YGT officials if they thought Owens would be there.⁴⁷ For all these reasons, it was justifiable, perhaps, for Calder to

papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴² “Greek Theatre Renamed “Festival.”

⁴³ Minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting, 16 March 1966.

⁴⁴ Jay Carr, “Her Dream: Greek Theater for Ypsilanti,” *Detroit News*, 7 June 1964.

⁴⁵ Farres interview.

⁴⁶ Bird interview.

⁴⁷ Jabbour interview.

fear that, as Owens waxed grandiloquent, interest in helping YGT might wane.

Mayhew brought Solomos' concerns over the name change to the attention of the committee. Owens suggested that the legal name of the corporation be used in conjunction with the new name in the following manner, The Ypsilanti Festival, Produced by Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc. After "much discussion," Owens agreed to get legal advice on this matter from YGT's attorney.

A proposal regarding the Ladies Library was brought up for discussion. Since December of 1965, it had been clear that YGT was outgrowing its current offices on Michigan Avenue. Owens and others had been investigating the possibility of renting a house somewhere in town. In the meanwhile, someone else had suggested that YGT move into the Ladies Library, as a temporary office until the permanent theatre was started. Now Project 73 was offering to provide volunteer help to put the old library in a condition for occupancy. Owens spoke up at once and told the group that she had a firm commitment on a house, which was available immediately, for \$175 per month. It was decided that further information should be sought on both proposals and that Kirschner should be consulted as to the final decision.⁴⁸

The YGT offices would eventually move into the Ladies Library and this was one of the actions taken by the new leadership that infuriated Clara Owens. Project 73's motivations for supporting this move are clear. The longer they could avoid the building's destruction, the more hope there was that it would never be destroyed. Moreover, the unoccupied building was deteriorating and a target for vandals. For Owens, here was more proof that the men involved with Project 73 were interested in

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting, 16 March 1966.

taking over *her* Greek Theatre.

The final item of note at the March 16 meeting was the discussion of the Festival site. Zeke Jabbour told the group that a third possibility, beyond a tent in the park and the baseball stadium, had been raised. The Chamber of Commerce had offered YGT a site, rent free, on West Michigan Avenue at Mansfield at the edge of town. On this site, they agreed to build a parking lot and erect a temporary structure called a Butler building.⁴⁹ It could be completed in sixty days. The EMU Board of Regents had given YGT permission to use the stadium, but only after the last home baseball game on May 27. There was concern that YGT would lose most of the student matinee season by this delay. The Butler building would gain them another week. There were serious questions, however, as indeed there should have been, about the quality of the acoustics and lighting in this type of temporary structure. The board decided to obtain a consultation from the Weese firm about the site choice as soon as possible.⁵⁰

March 17. The Chamber of Commerce sponsored the meeting where YGT made its case for the \$300,000 fund drive. Owens was there but there is no record of her addressing the group.⁵¹

March 19. The *Ypsilanti Press* published the editorial, "\$67,921 Left to Raise – Can We Afford to Fail?"

At this point, Clara Owens began to keep what amounts to a journal of the YGT actions that were upsetting her. What follows are the events of the day in Owens' own

⁴⁹ Ibid. Butler was a brand name of a prefabricated structure, which could be bought and then erected on a site of the customer's choosing.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Final Effort Made to Save Theatre."

words. Owens' anger certainly slants her account of these events, but the information is important for several reasons. It is more detailed than that available from board minutes or any other source; Owens died before this study was begun, so it is an important source of her "side" of the YGT story; and finally, the tenor and tone of the account will help the reader understand Owens' later actions against the YGT board.

Saturday afternoon, March 19, 1966

Mr. Fred Shaefer, Vice Pres. in charge of Finance and Office Procedure, called me at home, asking if I knew anything about a check for \$465 for personal expenses which had just been submitted to him by Mr. Kirschner. No vouchers had been attached. Mr. Shaefer refused to sign it. Mr. Shaefer also asked about the office staff and what salaries we were paying them now, since he had not been informed of the change. I had not been informed of any changes either but when I signed their checks I noticed that raises had been made from \$125 to \$140 and from \$100 to \$115 [per week].

Mr. Schaefer was leaving . . . for vacation and asked me if I would call Mr. Kirschner and ask about these items.⁵² I did. The telephone conversation accomplished nothing. Mr. Kirschner said that his manner of spending money was no concern of a member of the Board.

Saturday evening, March 19

I had called the office. Mr. Mayhew was not there. Mr. Rancont was. I discussed with him the advisability of calling together people from City Council, EMU, Chamber of Commerce, IDC and talking over co-operation and what we could do to finish our fund drive. I suggested he call Mr. Mayhew. Mr. Mayhew agreed. We made the calls.

15 minutes before the meeting Mr. Mayhew called me and said he thought it would be better if I did not come.

I did not go, although I did not understand why.⁵³

March 20. The previous day had upset Owens, but today would be even worse. Most of the active board members, including Owens, had spent the day on the telephone soliciting money. Late in the afternoon, Mayhew called Owens at her home and asked her to come into the office, right away, for a meeting. The group consisted of Clara

⁵² Owens, untitled document, "Saturday afternoon, March 19, 1966," Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁵³ Owens, "An Open Letter to Members of the Board of Directors of YGT," Farres papers.

Owens, John Mayhew, Richard Kirschner, Zeke Jabbour, Judy Riecker, James Gousseff, Ted Rancont, and Thor Marsh. Owens' account of the meeting follows.

Mr. Jabbour started by telling me that I was not cooperating. He went on for some time and I was not sure how or with whom I was not cooperating. At one time he called me paranoid.⁵⁴ This was a real shocker, to be so labeled, before a small group of directors, in such a vindictive way, by a director whom I personally had recommended for vice Pres [*sic*], for whom I had nothing but regards and did not know he felt this way. After more rambling but heated conversation, Mr. Kirschner said that he was the one I was not cooperating with. This again was a real blow. I had spent hours with him, going over records, plans, introducing him to people, trying to make the way easy. I had moved out of my office, turned over management and procedures to him and was in the office only occasionally.⁵⁵

Owens goes on to describe how Kirschner listed three specific examples which, he believed, demonstrated Owens' lack of cooperation. The first concerned a brochure that he claimed Owens had printed despite being asked not to do so. Owens asserts that the brochures were ordered in February, before Kirschner was officially hired. The second charge was that Owens was trying to circumvent Kirschner and Rancont, the YGT board member responsible for press relations, by making her own arrangements for a feature story with the *Detroit News*. Owens agrees that she proposed a story but denies making contact with the paper. Kirschner's third charge was that Owens had refused to tell him how much money was still outstanding on pledges made to YGT. Owens contends that

I replied I did not know, the last accurate statement would be in the Annual statement of Sept., prepared by our auditors. He would find a copy in the files. When I got to the office Rancont was there. After a few remarks I told Kirschner he could find the figures himself. Since I had already told him where to find them, it never occurred [*sic*] to me that he would distort the last part of my remarks to refusal to impart information.

Suddenly it occurred [*sic*] to me that he was only using these trivial

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Owens, "Saturday afternoon, March 19, 1966."

and untrue events because he was very angry with me because of the questions I had raised the day before. He was getting back and trying to belittle me before some of the Directors but I saw no reason why I should be insulted and humiliated at the whim of an employee, who was deliberately trying to make trouble. Exit, very much upset.⁵⁶

Zeke Jabbour regrets telling Owens she was paranoid, calling it a mistake.

She was accusing everybody of trying to get her and I said, 'Please don't be paranoid about this.' I'm a fairly gentle man myself. I certainly wouldn't have said anything to hurt her feelings, if I had thought about it. But I had been thinking that [she was paranoid] for some time, obviously, because she accused everybody of everything. But she, until then, had never turned on me particularly.⁵⁷

However, Jabbour insists that this intervention had to be made, because Owens' actions were hurting the theatre. "I don't know anybody that didn't have a problem [with Owens] from the city to the members of the board, if they were active at all, if they threatened her security."⁵⁸

March 21. The fund drive was declared a success and the board voted to go ahead with the 1966 season. Clara Owens and Alexis Solomos were both present at this special meeting of the board. Kirschner was not there; he was in New York waiting for the "go ahead" to finalize contracts.

No doubt in response to a request from Owens, John Mayhew brought the possibility of creating a financial oversight committee to the attention of the board. Owens was particularly concerned that Kirschner was allowed to sign checks up to \$1000 without another officer's signature. After "a lengthy discussion," the motion was tabled until Kirschner could be present to discuss the situation.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jabbour interview.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board of Directors, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 21 March 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Solomos had several issues to bring to the board. He spoke of the name change and told them that such a decision without consulting him represented an infringement on his responsibilities as Artistic Director. Mayhew told Solomos that it was not the intention of the board “to interfere, in any way, with the decisions of the Artistic Director.” The name was changed back to the original one. Solomos also wanted assurances that he would be consulted as to the budget and the site of the theatre. The baseball stadium was discussed “at much length.”⁶⁰

The most significant item on the agenda, other than the decision to go ahead with the season, was a major restructuring of the board, proposed by John Mayhew. He wanted to dissolve the existing executive and steering committees and all the positions associated with them. In their place, he wanted to establish two committees, a production committee and a development committee. They would be given enough autonomy to choose their own members and rule on specific matters of policy under their respective jurisdictions.⁶¹

The production committee would “determine those matters of general policy relating to the day-by-day administrative, technical, and artistic operations of the festival and to assist in their implementation.” Furthermore, the committee was to work closely with the executive and artistic directors to ensure “a superior quality of performance at every level of the physical operation, including, where appropriate, matters of administrative procedure, planning and preparation, budgeting, contracting, major purchasing, house and concession policies, promotion and public relations, etc.” The development committee’s responsibilities included “matters of general policy relating to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mayhew, “Proposed Resolutions – Ypsilanti Greek Theatre,” Farres papers.

fund-raising, long range planning, special activities and events, and all areas which contribute to the general 'image' of the Festival.”⁶²

The ostensible rationale, and one not without merit, for this restructuring was to streamline decision-making so the board could react quickly to the growing pressures of mounting the festival. Clearly though, it was also a way to cut Clara Owens out of the decision-making process. In response, Owens requested that a committee be formed to determine the specific duties of the Chairman of the Board. She also suggested that Mayhew's resolutions be brought to all the directors for a vote.⁶³

At the end of 1965, as an answer to the growing number of board members and their dwindling attendance at meetings, YGT had altered its constitution to create an artificial quorum of eleven.⁶⁴ The people present at the March 21 meeting comprised a quorum; however, Owens suggested that they present the matter to the full board. This was agreed upon. The meeting was set for the following week and letters of notification were sent to every board member. Owens had managed to delay the restructuring for a short while. Nevertheless, Mayhew seemed confident that his proposal would pass. At the end of the meeting, he announced that James Gousseff would head the production committee and Judy Riecker would chair the development committee.⁶⁵

Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart remembers that it was Richard Kirschner who talked her into chairing the development committee by promising her she would have help. Gordon Rust, an experienced fundraiser and a friend of Kirschner's, would “spend half the summer with me giving me instructions on what to do. Gordon came once and never

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ YGT minutes, 21 March 1966.

⁶⁴ YGT minutes, 9 December 1965.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

showed up again.” Kirschner later apologized to Riecker for Rust’s absence. They joked that it was because he was married to one of the Duponts and, like Montagues and Capulets, Duponts and Dows must never mix.⁶⁶

March 23. The Steering committee met. Clara Owens was there and brought Stewart Mott with her. For over two-and-a-half hours the committee wrangled over spending and budget issues.

Clara Owens aired her suspicions over Richard Kirschner’s spending, in particular, his expense account, the raises for the secretaries, and a check to David Bishop, who eventually was to become the production stage manager for YGT. The expense account items which “disturbed” Owens were “flowers for the office, food and beverages for two other directors [Gousseff and Rancont, totaling just over five dollars], upgrading travel fare, meals, room, etc.”⁶⁷ Owens wanted a review of the budget by the board and an agreement from Kirschner that he would obtain two signatures on every check from a board oversight committee of three or four members.⁶⁸ According to Owens, “Mr. Kirschner is presently signing all checks breaking them down into amounts of \$1,000 or less to comply with the letter, if not the spirit of his contract . . .”⁶⁹ Owens’ request for a budget committee was deferred to the regular board meeting, five days away.⁷⁰

Owens complaints sparked a question about David Bishop. No one at the meeting

⁶⁶ Rumelhart interview.

⁶⁷ Owens, untitled document, “A series of events have recently occurred . . .” Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁸ Minutes of the Steering Committee, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 23 March 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁹ Owens, untitled document, “A series of events . . .”

⁷⁰ YGT Steering Committee minutes, 23 March 1966.

was aware that he was under contract. Solomos told the committee that he had asked Kirschner to consult with him before signing anyone. It was decided that Solomos should call Kirschner (who was in New York) the next morning and inquire into the matter.⁷¹ Either Solomos was satisfied with what Kirschner told him the next day, or Bishop was already under contract, because Bishop did indeed become YGT's production stage manager. This is evidence, though, that Kirschner was not communicating particularly well with either Solomos or the YGT board at this point in time.

Clara Owens was also very concerned about the restructuring of the board. She wondered if it was within John Mayhew's authority to dissolve the executive committee. She fretted that there were "no Vice Presidents, no one to sign checks." She was reminded that the Mayhew's proposal had only been brought up for discussion and no committees or offices had been eliminated as of yet.⁷²

The issue of bonding employees was repeatedly brought up during the meeting. Finally, a motion was made, and carried, that the advice of counsel be sought on this matter. It was also decided, after "lengthy discussion," to hire an accounting firm to do an audit of the period from YGT's inception through 28 February 1966. This was in direct response to "an anonymous letter which was relevant to [YGT's] financial and tax deductibility status."⁷³ No copy of this letter is available.

In the midst of this, Stewart Mott interjected and asked the group if they had a budget committee. Owens responded, yes, it had consisted of Alexis Solomos, Tom Patterson, and herself and then the responsibility had been turned over to James Gousseff

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

and Ted Rancont. The results were summarized in a budget with only seven line-items, approved in December 1965 as part of the Festival “Plan of Action” (Table 1). Mott observed, somewhat impatiently, that “if a sufficiently detailed budget, specifying the amounts you would give to the production stage manager, etc., had been drawn, it would not be necessary to get into the situation we have now.”⁷⁴

Gousseff suggested that Solomos and Kirschner meet to prepare such a budget but there were objections to this plan. Finally, it was agreed that a budget committee would be established,

. . . with the Treasurer as Chairman; President, member *exofficio*; Artistic Director and Executive Director members thereof; and other such persons as the Chairman shall appoint; and its first duty will be to solicit from the Executive Director and the Artistic Director, at the earliest possible time, their budget for the 1966 calendar year, which the budget committee shall review and approve and subsequently present to the Board of Directors for final approval.⁷⁵

It was not until 18 May 1966 that a detailed, itemized budget was put to the board for approval. Of course, at this point, many of the costs itemized were for money that was already spent, or contracted to be spent. Furthermore, in spite of the newly formed budget committee, it was James Gousseff, as chair of the production committee, who presented the budget.⁷⁶ The carried motion to create it notwithstanding, there is no evidence the budget committee was ever convened.

March 25. Clara Owens sent a letter to each of the directors of YGT. It was essentially a thank-you letter to mark her resignation as president of YGT. She spelled

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 18 May 1966, Farres papers.

out

. . . a particular thanks to Thor Marsh, Fred Shaefer, Teddy Farres, Moray Kutzen, Steve Spilos and Tom Kentes. The seven of us have personally guaranteed thousands of dollars in loans, when times were bad or when our pledges were insufficient for our needs. Greater faith hath no man!⁷⁷

The letter is remarkably calm in tone when compared to many of Owens' later missives. Nevertheless, it contains some veiled references to Richard Kirschner. She felt it important to remind the directors that they had a "responsibility toward the people who, from their hearts and pocketbooks, have given us support . . ." Owens also noted,

We have passed through a stage of growth, fumbling, mistakes. We have been too trusting in many ways We have thought that 'hiring a man to do our work' would solve our problems. We have found that we must do our own work, thinking and planning. As the Board becomes increasingly aware of its own responsibilities, we can go forward.⁷⁸

March 26. Representatives from YGT and the city visited three potential sites for the theatre and discussed their relative merits. Included in the group were Owens, Solomos, Kirschner, and Jabbour. Mr. Herschberger represented the Harry Weese firm. Eldon Elder, YGT's scene designer, was there. Councilman Therkelsen, City Manager Semple and Bud Abbott, Director of Parks and Recreation were there for the city of Ypsilanti. Notes were taken; they form what amounts to an abridged transcript of the meeting.⁷⁹

Two of the sites were in Riverside Park. The first was the site of the intended theatre building and Jabbour told the group that he was opposed to this location if they had to use the tent for two seasons. That would mean they would have to move the tent

⁷⁷ Owens to Director, 25 March 1966, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

⁷⁸ Ibid (ellipses in original).

⁷⁹ "Visit to Three Sites on March 26, 1966," Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

the following year before the start of construction. Other problems included a low spot near the river that would reveal “mush about 3 ft. deep” once the sod was removed. Because of this, a large amount of fill would have to be brought onto the site. The second park site was ruled out almost immediately because sewer lines prevented excavation and utility lines overhead were too low for the forty-two foot high tent to fit beneath.⁸⁰

After the group inspected the stadium site, they returned to YGT offices to discuss the matter. Herschberger felt that the primary advantage of the first park location was the symbolism of having the first season on the site of the permanent theatre. The stadium site had the advantage of already having a theatre-like quality. The seats were already in place. He recommended the stadium.

Zeke Jabbour told the group that he would need at least four days for construction and installation of equipment into the stadium. Kirschner felt that it would be necessary to use some of the money from the building fund for the 1966 festival. Discussion then turned to the possibility of constructing a roof to cover the stage. Solomos insisted that it was “necessary that we see the sky,” despite the difficulty of lighting a matinee in an open area. Kirschner worried that, in the event of rain, the theatre would be unusable. The sound of rain on the tin-roof over the seating area would be “very noisy.” Herschberger suggested that various materials could be sprayed on the under side of the tin to dampen the sound. In general, it was thought that the acoustical problems would be no worse in the stadium than in a tent. A successful sound system was deemed an absolute necessity.⁸¹

The group recommended the stadium site. It was not available until May 27.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Given four days for construction and fifteen days for on-stage rehearsals, the group decided that the first preview opening would have to be as late as June 14 and the press openings delayed until June 25 and 26.⁸²

March 28. There was a meeting of the YGT board of directors and the restructuring of the board was approved with “Mrs. Owens dissenting on the grounds that it conceded too much authority to the committee and that the specific responsibility should be spelled out in greater detail.”⁸³

Other actions taken at this meeting include formal approval to pursue Eastern Michigan University’s offer of the stadium site and a vote of confidence in Zeke Jabbour to continue plans for preparing the site. Clara Owens was the lone dissenter in this vote of confidence.

Additionally, the committee formed to investigate potential office space recommended the use of the Ladies Library for YGT’s administrative offices. James Brown chaired the committee, though he was never a member of the YGT board. The committee was told to present their recommendation to Richard Kirschner and report at the next board meeting.⁸⁴ It is interesting that Brown was chosen to head this committee. His connections to the local historical preservation groups and Project 73 certainly call his objectivity into question. Clara Owens was clearly suspicious of his motives.⁸⁵

Richard Kirschner joined the board towards the end of the meeting. He “spoke about the present budget, stating he would be happy to meet with any representatives of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 28 March 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ YGT minutes, 28 March 1966.

the board to determine a new budget.” When he was pressed as to exactly when he could produce a written version of the budget, he replied by the first day of rehearsals.⁸⁶

Kirschner also requested that the board approve several employee contracts. These included Donald Britton as box office treasurer; Harvey Sabinson as national press representative; Morton Leavy, a New York attorney specializing in theatrical contracts, and board member Ted Rancont, as local press representative. The board unanimously passed the motion to approve the contracts. Rancont offered his resignation as a member of the board and it was accepted.⁸⁷

Ted Rancont had been the drama critic and county editor at the *Ann Arbor News* for the past five years and had a solid background in theatre and public relations.⁸⁸ It is interesting to note that Owens voted for Rancont’s contract. He had been a part of the meeting on March 19 when Kirschner called Owens to task for acting unilaterally. Additionally, on 4 June 1966, Owens would complain in a letter to Peter Zeisler, then of the Guthrie Theatre, that

The Directors are having a field day . . . two have been employed at large salaries and another is contracting for the summer facility, which was expected to cost \$60,000.00. He let no bids and showed no specifications. I missed some meetings and there is to pay.⁸⁹

The reference here to Zeke Jabbour as the contractor is obvious. His reply to the charge that he let no bids is “When? (*Laughing.*) When and how! There was no plan. You have to have plans to let things out on bid.”⁹⁰ However, Ted Rancont could be one of the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “Theatre PR Head Named,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 12 April 1966.

⁸⁹ Owens to Zeisler, 4 June 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (ellipses in original).

⁹⁰ Jabbour interview.

two “employed at large salaries” to whom Owens referred. He is the only board member ever recorded to have received any kind of salary. Rancont was paid \$225 per week.⁹¹ This was a respectable sum at the time. Rancont was not underpaid, but it is also clear that, as local press representative for the YGT, he faced a Herculean labor in keeping pace with the mad dash to advertise the upcoming season.

The events of March 1966 raise two questions that need to be explored. Was Kirschner spending extravagantly and was Clara Owens treated fairly by the YGT board? Opinions vary among board members as to Kirschner’s spending habits. Judy Rumelhart emphatically denies that Kirschner ever misspent funds. “If he spent four hundred dollars, he probably *saved* four hundred dollars. That was the kind of person he was.”⁹² James Gousseff’s response to the question was, “He did fly first class but beyond that (*laughing*), I didn’t think he was very extravagant.” Gousseff went on to explain

Because of the time pressure, once Kirschner got there and looked at the calendar – panic in the streets! Jobs had to be done today and, if they cost more because they had to be done today, they cost more. Nothing could be done about it. Once we had committed to an opening date, the professionals simply had to get the job done in that time. We tried as much as possible to get out of their way. And this was something [Clara Owens] constitutionally could not do. I mean, it just wasn’t her way.⁹³

Zeke Jabbour was less comfortable with Richard Kirschner’s spending habits. When asked whether he thought there was some justice to Clara Owens’ charges of extravagance, Jabbour replied, “Well, I think a little, yeah, but . . . I was used to the APA, which was fairly frugal in all but artistic areas. [Kirschner] was used to New York prices,

⁹¹ “YGT Weekly Operating Costs, June 14 – September 4,” Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁹² Rumelhart interview.

⁹³ Gousseff interview.

for one thing, and everything down here seemed cheap to him.”⁹⁴

Owens accused Kirschner of going “wild . . . he raised all salaries employed about twice as many people in administrative jobs as were necessary (we had 11 people in the box office at one time).”⁹⁵ Jabbour agrees with Owens that the YGT administration “was top heavy, but time was so short, there was so much to do that I can understand [Kirschner] wanting to have extra help and maybe that’s why he did. The speed with which we launched the festival was expensive and that would be true in any case.” However, Jabbour emphatically believes that, while it is possible to question Kirschner’s competence in terms of economy, “in terms of fraud or anything like that, I will *guarantee* you that he did not personally profit from it. In fact, it probably hurt him because [YGT] didn’t succeed.”⁹⁶

As to whether Clara Owens was treated fairly by her board of directors, most members of the board who were interviewed believe she was. John Mayhew agrees but, when asked if there were pro-Clara or anti-Clara factions on the board, he replied,

Oh, I’m sure there was. I think there were more anti-Clara people than Clara-people Most of the people who were trying to run the theatre, or get it going, were sort of upset at Clara, because she was kind of pushy, you know. And she had her own ideas and she’d start to tell you without the drop of a hat.⁹⁷

Jabbour describes a “sad anti-Clara camp.” “Everybody was saddened by the fact that they wanted to give her credit but they didn’t want to give her control. And that made life very difficult, because she wanted both the credit and the control.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Jabbour interview.

⁹⁵ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁹⁶ Jabbour interview.

⁹⁷ Mayhew interview.

⁹⁸ Jabbour interview.

Rumelhart is not sure if Owens was treated fairly. She tried to explain her own behavior this way,

It comes back to [the fact that] I was hanging over the barrel with the money we'd brought in and the money we'd spent to get to where we were I said, 'I will get this money for you, if we're going forward. If we're not going forward, there's no point in getting the money So I came from a different place. Clara became like a child. I don't know how else to put it.'⁹⁹

Of course, there are people, some of them board members, who would vehemently disagree that Clara was treated fairly by the YGT board. Fred Shaefer, the board member who questioned Kirschner's expense account, could well be a member of this group, but he is not alive to tell us his opinion. Very few people who might recount Owens' side of the story are still alive.

Peter Fletcher, a prominent Ypsilanti citizen then and now, would certainly argue that Owens was treated unfairly. He wrote to Owens when she was overseas in April 1967. His letter updated the current YGT situation. Fletcher had nothing but contempt for the YGT leadership. In closing the letter, he wrote, "Clara, do nothing until you get back and see for yourself that the most horrible predictions we made last summer . . . are come to pass."¹⁰⁰

Whether Owens was generally treated fairly by her board or not, some petty behavior was exhibited by both Owens and Kirschner. Take, for example, the following incident, which Clara Owens described in her open letter to the board under the heading, "Days of Despair."

⁹⁹ Rumelhart interview.

¹⁰⁰ Fletcher to Owens, 20 April 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. When approached for an interview, Fletcher denied ever having anything to do with "that bunch of crooks" and refused to comment any further. Nevertheless, Mr. Fletcher clearly was involved with YGT.

Mr. Kirschner takes down all the photographs of three years of history of YGT. He says they are not artistic.

I brought six out of the basement – The Governor with one of our outstanding honorary directors and a great and good friend of YGT; Judith Anderson when she came to us when we had nothing but a dream; Zonta, the first service club to donate some money to us; the YGT float in the 4th of July Parade; two others.

They were taken down again.¹⁰¹

These types of conflicts between Owens and Kirschner may have distracted attention from the legitimate disputes between them.

In early April 1966, the scene of action and confrontation shifted from the YGT boardroom to the city council chambers. On April 2, the *Ypsilanti Press* announced the Greek Theatre's decision to use Eastern Michigan University's baseball stadium, Briggs Field, as the location of the 1966 festival.¹⁰² Shortly thereafter, Bud Abbott, Director of the City Parks and Recreation Department, wrote a letter to the University Board of Regents, in which he indicated that he was upset that the city's youth baseball leagues would be displaced by the festival. The afternoon of April 11, the regents voted to take no action on a Greek Theatre request to use the ball field until the city had reconciled the differences between the theatre and the recreational programs. The regents did not believe they should be asked to settle the dispute by choosing sides.¹⁰³ This vote by the regents became a somewhat heated topic of discussion at the city council meeting that very evening.

It seems Bud Abbott wrote to the regents on his own authority and his views were not represented at the council. Some city council members were annoyed with what they

¹⁰¹ Owens, "Open Letter."

¹⁰² "Scholars' Guesses Will Transform Stadium to Classic Greek Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 April 1966.

¹⁰³ "Council Backs Use of Briggs Field for Site of First Greek Theatre Festival," *Ypsilanti Press*, 12 April 1966.

perceived as a usurpation of their authority by a city employee. City Manager Robert Semple came to Abbott's defense.

Manager Semple stated that . . . it was his interpretation that the letter reflected Mr. Abbott's personal feeling and [was] not intended to be any official action on the part of the City Government. [Abbott] should have discussed the matter with me first regarding any possible implications. However, because of Mr. Abbott's long interest and great devotion to the recreational programs, he can be excused. He was concerned about the lack of a field for the youth's sporting activities . . . [I am] sure another ball diamond location could be found which would substitute.¹⁰⁴

The council voted to go on record as having no objections to the festival's location at Briggs Field. Zeke Jabbour, who was in attendance, thanked the council for their prompt action, stating that further delays would have been disastrous for the project.¹⁰⁵

The controversy sparked an *Ypsilanti Press* editorial, "Briggs Split Unhappy; Let's Pull Together, Not Apart." The editorial contended that, while everyone involved was in favor of the boys baseball program, the question was not "Greek Theatre or boys baseball," it was "Greek Theatre and boys baseball or boys baseball and no Greek Theatre." According to the article, the \$300,000 figure for the fundraising goal was based on obtaining the stadium site; otherwise, the goal would have been placed at \$340,000. The costs of using a tent were that much higher. The *Ypsilanti Press* had gone so far as to withhold the approximately \$40,000 in their Festival Fund until the stadium site was verified. The paper had promised its readers that it would not release the funds until the 1966 season was guaranteed. The editors firmly believed that, unless the stadium site was approved, or another \$40,000 gift was received, the 1966 season would

¹⁰⁴ Council Proceedings, 11 April 1966.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

be impossible to realize.¹⁰⁶

The editorial scolded both Mr. Abbott and the Greek Theatre for failing to communicate with each other and with city council. By doing so, they had placed the EMU Regents in an “absolutely unfair and extremely unfortunate position,” for which there was no justification. Though both parties could be excused, Abbott for his concern for the children, YGT for the time pressures they faced, the whole incident had been regrettable.¹⁰⁷

Other ball fields were found for the recreational program. Unfortunately, this fact and the *Ypsilanti Press* editorial did not end the ill will this controversy created within the community, as Judy Riecker was chagrined to discover. Riecker had been encouraged by the United Auto Workers Union to approach its Ypsilanti local for support. She and Zeke Jabbour went out to the union hall for an early morning appointment.

We got there and we were taken into a room. There were nine guys. I was the only woman The guy behind the desk was a big, burly man and the phone would ring about, hmmm, maybe every forty seconds. And he'd pick it up and he'd say, 'Good morning, brother. What did they do to you today?' We're talking the sixties, right? You know, anger, real anger. This went on for half an hour. Zeke and I sat in this room and we didn't say a word. Finally, this man looked up, and looked at us, and [snarled very slowly], 'You get your God-damned foreign theatre out of our baseball diamond.' He looked back down and we were dismissed. How do you *respond* to people like this? There's no way to respond.¹⁰⁸

The baseball controversy was not the only YGT issue to find its way to the city council in April. The battle over the Ladies Library building was waged within the council chambers as well. Clara Owens would lose this battle and when she took her

¹⁰⁶ “Briggs Split Unhappy; Let's Pull Together, Not Apart,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 13 April 1966.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Rumelhart interview.

complaints to the newspapers, the YGT board decided to remove her as chairman.

The sequence of events leading to Owens' removal began April 5, when YGT approached city council to request the Ladies Library as an interim location for the theatre's central offices. Concerns over the ability of the group to bring the building up to code led the council to table the motion until the next study session.¹⁰⁹ Thor Marsh, representing YGT at the next council meeting, urged the city to decide quickly in the theatre's favor. Only sixty-five days remained before performances were to begin and YGT believed having offices so close to the site of the permanent theatre would be a distinct advantage. Again, there were concerns about bringing the building up to code. Councilman Keller, in particular, was worried about the precedent that would be set if YGT was not held to the same building code standards as everyone else. City Manager Semple thought perhaps the standards for temporary occupancy would not be as stringent as those for permanent occupancy. Finally, the council made a unanimous decision to lease the Ladies Library to YGT on a month-to-month basis for the sum of one dollar, with the understanding that the Greek Theatre was to assume all the financial costs of bringing it up to code for minimum occupancy.¹¹⁰

The lease document was brought to the council for review at their April 18 meeting. The safety of the building again became a subject of debate. City Manager Semple advised the council that an inspection had not been made since the last meeting because no one from the Greek Theatre had contacted the Building Inspection Department in the interim. This was a matter of concern for several council members. Zeke Jabbour was present and told the council that representatives from YGT had

¹⁰⁹ Council Proceedings, 5 April 1966.

¹¹⁰ Council Proceedings, 11 April 1966.

inspected the building before they had even brought the matter to council. The theatre group was convinced that, with the proffered help from Project 73, they could bring the building satisfactorily up to code. After a few more questions, the lease agreement was read aloud to the assemblage.¹¹¹

At this point, Clara Owens stood to address the council and completely undermined Jabbour, who was officially acting on the behalf of YGT. She began by stating that, “there seemed to be quite a bit of misunderstanding regarding the use of the old library building.” She went on to say that “at no time has the Greek Theatre asked for a lease on this building – it was to be a means of preserving the building until such time as Project 73 could move [it]; simply a stop-gap measure.” Neither had the Greek theatre promised to “rehabilitate” the building. Owens had made some inquiries with two companies that specialized in moving buildings and found that neither was eager to do so because logistics made the costs prohibitive. In fact, only one of the companies was willing to give even an estimate, which ranged between \$6,000 for demolition and \$25,000 to move the building. Furthermore, Harry Weese and Associates, YGT’s architects, had indicated to Owens that, in order for construction to begin on the permanent theatre, they required use of the entire site for fifteen to eighteen months. Such a requirement severely limited the potential length of YGT’s occupancy of the Ladies Library.¹¹²

Owens, whether deliberately or not, was obfuscating the issue. YGT certainly had officially asked for a lease on the building as recently as the previous council meeting. Additionally, moving the building had never been a part of YGT’s petitions to

¹¹¹ Council Proceedings, 18 April 1966.

¹¹² Ibid.

the city council. Project 73 had brought this possibility to the council only once, when they requested a 180-day "notice of intent" back in January 1966.¹¹³

Owens concluded her remarks by stating firmly that YGT did not want the Ladies Library and declined its use as office space for the Greek Theatre. Poor Zeke Jabbour told the council that "unless he was mistaken, he had been commissioned by the Greek Theatre Board to negotiate for the use of the old library building for interim office space." The city attorney, Kenneth Bronson remarked, rather dryly, that "there appeared to be no question as to the terms of the lease, but as to the question of an agreement at all." He suggested that the city offer the lease and let the Greek theatre decide whether they would enter it once they had sorted out their own problems. The council unanimously agreed.¹¹⁴

At the next YGT board meeting on April 27, Zeke Jabbour strongly voiced his disapproval of Clara Owens' actions in front of the city council, stating that she had made things very difficult for him in his negotiations. Owens replied that "she had been asked by a member of the Council to attend the meeting and was only voicing her own view on the question."¹¹⁵ However, the council minutes clearly indicate that Owens purported to speak on behalf of YGT.¹¹⁶ Jabbour declined to challenge her veracity though, and the YGT board voted to enter the lease agreement, despite Owens' repeated objections.¹¹⁷

Two other items of note occurred at the April 27 board meeting. A report from Owens, as Chairman of the Board, was on the agenda. When asked to give her report she

¹¹³ Council Proceedings, 17 January 1966.

¹¹⁴ Council Proceedings, 18 April 1966.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 27 April 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹¹⁶ Council Proceedings, 18 April 1966.

¹¹⁷ YGT minutes, 27 April 1966.

introduced an auditor,

Mr. Post of Post, Smythe, Lutz, and Zeil and explained that she had asked Mr. Post to attend the meeting as a result of the recommendation of Stewart Mott that [YGT] conduct an audit covering a period from inception to March 1966. Mrs. Owens made the recommendation that this audit be made, that she felt very strongly that the entire office and the Board of Directors were under suspicion.¹¹⁸

How very disappointed Clara Owens must have been when Mr. Post told the group that, after looking at the records for the past two years, his firm “would not care to do another audit as they felt the previous audits were correct.”¹¹⁹

Owens’ greatest disappointment that evening, however, was with the board’s decision not to produce a third play. James Gousseff reported for the production committee that the season would run from June 14 to September 4, with June 28 and 29 being the press openings. He then went on to state that the season would consist of only two plays. Alexis Solomos and Richard Kirschner had withdrawn their recommendations for a third play.¹²⁰

Just two weeks earlier, at the last board meeting, Gousseff had announced that the same two men had recommended that plans for the third play be carried out. Negotiations for the royalties for Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* had been completed and Frank Cosaro had agreed to direct. The board had accepted this recommendation.¹²¹

When “Mrs. Owens objected very strenuously” to the idea of dropping the third play, Gousseff explained that

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 13 April 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

. . . with the third play, there would be royalties to pay, an additional director, scene designs, costume designs and possibly additional talent fees, plus the fact that the orchestra would have to be paid overtime. He further stated that we may sacrifice the quality of *The Birds* and the *Oresteia* if we attempted another play.¹²²

There was another reason, not mentioned in the minutes, why the production committee withdrew its recommendation for *The Emperor Jones*. By this time, Richard Kirschner had negotiated a contract with Ruby Dee to join the company and the hope was to convince her husband, actor Ossie Davis, to star in *The Emperor Jones*. Gousseff remembers receiving a call from Kirschner just before this board meeting. Kirschner told him that Davis had refused to do the show because it was on a list of plays the civil rights movement had singled out for protest. There was no time, Kirschner believed, to find a replacement for the play. According to Gousseff,

That was a *real* blow, because the idea of doing two Greeks and a Eugene O'Neill was terrific, as was the idea of being able to use not only Ruby Dee, but Ossie Davis as well. That would give Ruby Dee a second role, which she had anticipated. She didn't come to the wilds of Ypsilanti just to do Cassandra.¹²³

(Actually, Dee did have a small, but spectacular, second role as the goddess Iris in *The Birds*.)

Owens was so upset by the two decisions, first to drop the third play and secondly to lease the Ladies Library, that she sent a statement two days later to the *Ypsilanti Press* and the *Ann Arbor News*. It reads

It is customary for many organizations, councils, clubs etc. to publish the voting record of their members.

I feel that it is only right and proper to inform the public that I voted 'no' on shortening our schedule of plays from three to two this season. We had budgeted three plays and had accepted many contributions with the understanding that we would produce three plays. Also, the original

¹²² YGT minutes, 27 April 1966.

¹²³ Gousseff interview.

committee plus Mr. Solomos felt that three plays would constitute a festival and would encourage visitors to remain a longer time in the area (Ypsilanti) consequently assisting the homeowners (people) who would like to rent rooms, plus the merchants who have contributed so generously to YGT.

I voted 'no' on renovation of the Old Library with Ypsilanti Greek Theatre funds. There is adequate space in many homes and offices for additional desk space for YGT offices. Donations were made to the YGT fund for production of plays and not for the restoration of old buildings.¹²⁴

Owens later described her reasons for making this statement and her opinion of the YGT board's reaction to it.

I was called continually by people, to whom I was the theatre. I sent a statement to the [Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor] papers, finally, that I had not voted to restore the old library for office space, and had not voted to cancel a play . . . a third play . . . since it had been budgeted.

I was called to the Office for a special meeting, a motion was already prepared to suspend me as Chairman of the Board . . . no investigation of the news stories had been made and I had been misquoted. 1½ hours was spent trying to get me to sign a statement that I would not make any public statements unless they had been cleared by the YGT press department. I think this made me 'madder' than anything.¹²⁵

The *Ypsilanti Press* did not print an article based on Owens' statement, but the *Ann Arbor News* did. Owens was not misquoted, however. Some of her language was edited for clarity and the paper drew the not unreasonable conclusion, given her statement, that the decision to drop the third play "was made in order to have funds to remodel the old Ypsilanti library."¹²⁶ What Owens actually wrote was, "Donations were made to the YGT fund for production of plays and not for the restoration of old buildings."¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Owens, "Statement to the Newspapers," Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹²⁵ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (ellipses in original).

¹²⁶ "Greek Theatre Drops Third Play," *Ann Arbor News*, 29 April 1966.

¹²⁷ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

The *Ann Arbor News* contacted James Gousseff and included his comments in its article. Gousseff told the paper “the decision to mount two productions . . . was taken in order to insure the highest possible artistic standards.” Trying to mount a third play would “dilute the quality of the entire festival,” he explained. Furthermore, “even if a third production were mounted, it could not open until the end of July, and therefore would represent a waste of contributor’s funds, inasmuch as it would be possible to present only a very limited number of performances at the end of the season.” Gousseff also pointed out that both the Stratford, Ontario and Stratford, Connecticut festivals mounted only two productions in their inaugural seasons for many of the same reasons. Gousseff concluded,

While we all appreciate the tremendous accomplishment of Mrs. Owens in bringing the YGT into being, if the festival is now to succeed, it is necessary for the professional staff to carry on. We urge the community and the entire board, including Mrs. Owens, to unite behind the festival in these exciting days.¹²⁸

Richard Kirschner was also contacted for comment. He told the paper that both Solomos and he had recommended that only two plays be produced in the first season. He also said that “this was Solomos’ position from the time of his arrival in September [1966].” If this statement is true, however, Solomos never made his position public until the April 27 board meeting.

Clara Owens had created a public relations nightmare for the YGT board and they reacted. They called a special meeting on 2 May 1966. Mayhew read the *Ann Arbor News* article aloud to Owens and the fourteen other board members in attendance. A discussion followed. Owens was told that it was “untenable for the Board of Directors of

¹²⁸ “Greek Theatre Drops Third Play.”

the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre to endure the accusations made by the Chairman of the Board, a person so clearly representing the board and the Theatre.”¹²⁹

Clara Owens’ copy of the minutes for this meeting is in the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. She underlined items and made comments in the margins of this copy, so there is at least a partial record of Owens’ reactions to the meeting. Owens underlined the word “accusations” and wrote “not true.” She did not believe her statement to the paper constituted an accusation.¹³⁰

Owens was asked if the newspaper had quoted her correctly. She said no. Jabbour found that hard to believe, and reminded the group of Owens’ public opposition to signing the lease at the city council meeting. Owens was asked if she had requested a retraction. She replied, “It would have been useless, I did not even try.” She added that her motivation for the statement had been the numerous telephone calls she had received asking her why she had supported the move to the Ladies Library.¹³¹

Richard Skinner was very concerned. He believed that “irreparable damage had been done to the entire project, a decision should be made tonight as to what should be done, as the situation was very critical.” Owens responded by reading her press statement aloud to the group. Mayhew contended that the sentence, “Donations were made to the YGT fund for production of plays and not for the restoration of old buildings,” suggested that the board was misusing funds. Jabbour felt that, “the implication that funds were being diverted from the productions to the library building was a misrepresentation of the reason for canceling the third play and asked what

¹²⁹ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 2 May 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

decision, if any, the Board of Directors should take.” John Mayhew pointed out that “the organization could not work effectively if its members publicly protested formal decisions taken by the organization.”¹³²

In the midst of this exchange, Worden Geer asked Clara Owens if she knew who was behind a twenty-signature petition calling for

. . . a special meeting of the members of the corporation to inquire into and discuss the following items: (1) an exact accounting of the money on hand, (2) the proposed budget of the coming season, (3) what control the board has over expenditures, and (4) clarification of the status of the old Library building.¹³³

The board minutes indicate that Owens “replied by asking if this was part of the charges against her.” Though, in the margin Owens has written, “I said it was signed,” implying that, if the directors wanted to know who was behind the petition, they could read it for themselves.¹³⁴

It is an interesting collection of names. The first fifteen out of twenty signatures are those of Eastern Michigan University faculty and staff, friends and colleagues of J. Henry Owens. The sixteenth signature was that of another friend of Clara and J. Henry Owens, Mr. Peter B. Fletcher.¹³⁵ It must have been fairly obvious to the YGT board, exactly who was behind this petition.

When discussion returned to the public statement by Owens, James Gousseff inquired as to whether she did not feel that she was doing the organization any harm by making such statements. In reply,

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Petition attached to Owens to The Members of the Corporate Body of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 12 July 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library University of Michigan.

¹³⁴ YGT minutes, 2 May 1966.

¹³⁵ Petition, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Mrs. Owens stated that she did not think this statement did any harm, she did not believe Mr. Solomos was going to leave and Mr. Solomos was putting on the Festival. In the discussion that followed, Mrs. Owens stated that everyone had a right to express their opinion [*sic*] to the newspapers, if she were placed in the same position again she would handle it in the same way and sign any further statements with her name only. Mr. Mayhew asked Mrs. Owens if she was in support of the board. She asked for an end to the discussion as she wanted to know what the board intended to do about this matter. Mr. Mayhew asked if there were any other board members who felt that this type of action was a hazard to the project. Mr. Gousseff stated, as representative of the Production Committee, and in the view of the professional staff, that he felt that statements of this sort, in the newspapers, are greatly detrimental to the festival this summer. [He] made a motion, on behalf of the Production Committee, until such time as the resolution of what appears to be a campaign of public opposition, regarding board policies, comes to an end, that the Chairman of the Board be suspended from that office. Mr. Jabbour supported the motion.¹³⁶

Owens responded to the motion with a threat. She told the board that, “she had talked to the Greek Embassy and invited the Ambassador to attend the opening, however . . . if suspended, she would make it very clear to the Embassy that she will not be available if he does attend.”¹³⁷ A childish threat perhaps, but Judy Rumelhart provides some insight into it. She describes this difficult meeting,

The night that Clara [was suspended] was the most difficult night, I think, that I’ve ever spent in my life. We all sat down and said, ‘Clara you’ve got to stop being so negative. It’s our only chance.’

[Clara said], ‘Well, I’m going to stop this right now.’

And I said, ‘Clara, you’ve got my mother’s money. That’s what has paid for it. You can’t stop it. If the theatre closes tonight – or if it doesn’t open – that’s lost money. You can’t do that.’ And she was so angry that she simply lost control She was flailing. Do you know the difference between being angry and just flailing? It’s out of control.¹³⁸

The motion to suspend Owens made Richard Skinner uncomfortable and he asked for

¹³⁶ YGT minutes, 2 May 1966.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Rumelhart interview.

. . . a discussion to determine another way to solve the problem. Mr. Jabbour remarked that the dignity of the board had been challenged. [Moray] Kutzen felt the matter could be resolved if Mrs. Owens would agree not to make public statements without discussion with the board first. It was noted that this was requested of both the Artistic Director and Executive Director also. Mrs. Owens said she could not agree to this, if asked a question by the press, she would have to give an honest answer. She requested the following statement be incorporated into the minutes: 'I am not bitter, I do not want to be President. I resigned of my own free will. After a discussion with a few people, I suggested Mr. Mayhew. I have not tried to undermine Mr. Mayhew, I have had very little contact with him.'¹³⁹

According to Owens' margin notes, "Mr. John Calder talked at *length*," at some point in this last exchange, but it was not mentioned in the minutes. She does not specify whether Calder spoke in her defense or not. Mayhew finally called for a vote on the motion to suspend. A ballot vote was taken; eight voted for suspension, four voted against, two abstained. Clara Owens was removed from office.¹⁴⁰

In the first four months of 1966, the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre enlisted several new board members who would play key roles in the financing and physical aspects of the 1966 season. They had a new president in John Mayhew and a new board structure. They hired Richard Kirschner as their executive director and at his insistence completed a \$300,000 fund drive, which was remarkable for the speed and scope of the community response. A site for the festival was finally secured when Eastern Michigan University consented to the Greek Theatre's use of Briggs baseball stadium. However, rifts between YGT's founder, Clara Owens, and YGT's leadership led to Owens' suspension as an officer of the board and this internal dissension would have a profound effect on the success of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.

¹³⁹ YGT minutes, 2 May 1966.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

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THE YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE, 1963-1968

VOLUME II

By

Laura C. Bird

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to

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Theatre

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CHAPTER FOUR

YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE, 1966 SEASON

“MALICE IN BLUNDERLAND”

Amazingly enough, in the midst of all this conflict, YGT was beginning to put a festival together. To track the speed with which this happened and relate it to the sequence of events leading to Owens’ removal from the Chairmanship, it will be useful to return to a journal format.

April 13. At the YGT board meeting, James Gousseff announced that Actor’s Equity had granted the theatre a concession that, of the twenty-four principals, six could be non-Equity. The board voted to post the required \$21,300 salary bond with the union. They also approved the contract of Harold (Buddy) Kusell as company manager.¹ Kusell was a reputable manager with a great deal of experience, particularly with Broadway road shows.²

Zeke Jabbour updated the group on the progress of the stadium site and the Ladies Library. He also announced that rehearsal space had been found in the gymnasium and the basement of the largest Catholic church in Ypsilanti. These would be just two of four different sites around town. Finding rehearsal space had been an unexpected difficulty for festival organizers. Development committee chair Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart remembers that she, Jabbour, Solomos, and Kirschner “spent *days* trying to collect places

¹ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 13 April 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

² Rumelhart interview.

to rehearse. We were just like scavengers trying to be professional, which was not easy.” The obstacle was that YGT was required to follow Equity rules for a dancing chorus, which required wooden floors for rehearsals. Finding spaces large enough with the proper floors was a challenge.³ The other two sites were the Ypsilanti Armory and an abandoned school known as Old Foster. YGT hired a bus and a driver to shuttle cast members from place to place.⁴

A final item of note at the April 13 board meeting, was an offer that board member Worden Geer had received from “an influential citizen.” During a telephone conversation, this gentleman had proffered a donation of “a substantial sum of money” to YGT if the theatre would publish a financial statement. Geer had also been the recipient of an anonymous letter making the same sort of request back in March. The board, after some discussion, concluded that publishing a statement in the newspapers “would not be advisable.” They did consider, however, opening their books to this individual and Geer was asked to meet with him to work out a possible solution.⁵ No further mention of this situation is made in any of the available YGT documents.

April 18. The Ypsilanti City Council approved Zeke Jabbour’s request for a lease on the Ladies Library, despite Clara Owens’ assertion that YGT was not interested in leasing the building.⁶

April 25. Chorus rehearsals began for the *Oresteia*. Nearly thirty members of the acting and production company had arrived in Ypsilanti over the past seven days. Contract negotiations were in the final stages for the leading roles.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Watchful ‘Mother Hen’ Chauffeurs Greek Chorus,” *Ypsilanti Press* 9 June 1966.

⁵ YGT minutes, 13 April 1966.

⁶ Council proceedings, 18 April 1966.

A few area natives were involved in rehearsals as well. There had been a local call for chorus roles. William Cross recalled his audition for Alexis Solomos.

[Auditions were held] in a very reverberant room that [Solomos] was just holding fort in . . . I remember going in and I had just one . . . very short thing memorized. And then I brought some other stuff with me – a book-marked anthology of Shakespeare. I had a couple things from *Richard II* I was going to read, do. I didn't come very prepared to this professional audition and [Solomos] was used to people far more prepared than I was. I was obviously not a professional actor . . . but I did something and he just nodded and said, 'What else?'

I said, ' Well, I'm sorry, I don't have anything else memorized but I do have something here to read.'

And he said 'Read?!'

And I said, " Well, yeah, I mean I, that's, I mean I do it pretty good.

And he said, 'All right, let's hear what you've got.' So I just stood up . . . and I read from *Richard II*. I thought I nailed it . . .

And after that he said, 'O.K., O.K., I've heard enough. I'm, uh, generally impressed. We may be contacting you.' And that was it.⁷

However, Cross was not contacted for quite a while. Then, at the last minute, he was hired as one of the non-Equity chorus members.⁸ Solomos interviewed between 400 and 500 young performers, both in Michigan and New York for the festival's thirty-two chorus roles.⁹

April 27. At the board meeting that evening, YGT's directors voted to drop the third play from the 1966 season and to pursue the lease on the Ladies Library. Perhaps in an attempt to limit his contact with Owens, Richard Kirschner "extended a very cordial invitation to the board to visit the office but requested that a telephone call be placed first because of the very crowded conditions."¹⁰

April 28. The *New York Times* reported the signing of Dame Judith Anderson to

⁷ Cross interview.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Judith Anderson Praises Ypsilanti on TV Show," *Ypsilanti Press*, 26 May 1966.

¹⁰ YGT minutes, 27 April 1966.

play the role of Clytemnestra in the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre's production of the *Oresteia*.

The article also mentioned *The Birds*, the stadium conversion, and the \$300,000 fund drive. It explained that Miss Anderson had recently been performing in Australia, her native land. She was doing staged readings of *Medea* and *Macbeth*. Anderson told the paper that, because of the readings, "I haven't had any direction for a long time . . . It will be a marvelous experience for me to do a play of this stature."¹¹

A negative experience with Robert Whitehead, Anderson's director for the New York production of *Medea*, had kept her out of the London production of that show. Her regret for missing that opportunity may have made Dame Judith particularly willing to accept a role with YGT. Robert Whitehead tells this story,

Judith Anderson was extraordinary; she had a huge talent. She was an animal-like figure on stage. But at all times we had nothing but disagreements. Our relationship was horrible. I think she felt I was kind of a young upstart. I wanted to do the play in certain ways that were probably too modern in feeling for her. She was right, I'm sure.

After it played in New York, I wanted to put *Medea* on in London, I asked Judith if she would do it. 'Not if you're the producer,' she said. That burned me up so much that I went off to London and did it with somebody else. It was a mistake; it didn't work. I was so angry, I thought I would never speak to Judith again.¹²

Thirty years later, Whitehead agreed to direct a production of *Medea* for the Robinson Jeffers Foundation in their open-air theatre in Carmel, California. Whitehead learned that Anderson had recommended his wife, Zoe Caldwell as "the only woman in the world who can play Medea." At the Jeffers Foundation's request, Whitehead drove to Anderson's home in Santa Barbara to meet her,

Judith was now about eighty-five. She stepped out of her house.

¹¹ "Ypsilanti Greek Theater Casts Judith Anderson in 'Oresteia,'" *New York Times*, 28 April 1966.

¹² Myrna Katz Frommer and Harvey Frommer, ed., *It Happened on Broadway* (New York: Harcourt, 1998) 49-50.

"You stopped me from doing the one thing I wanted to do in my life," she said to me.

'What are you talking about?'

'The London production of Medea.'

'I begged you to do it. But you said you wouldn't if I produced it.'

'Why should I? You treated me so terribly.'

I thought to myself, 'This is the exact conversation we had thirty years ago.'

Finally I said, 'Let's forget all of that. Let's not discuss it.'

Then she said, 'I want to play the nurse.'

'I couldn't do it with you, Judith, I couldn't.'

'Whom are you going to get who is better?'

'I couldn't direct it with you.'

'Oh, my god, don't tell me you're going to direct? Then she quickly added, 'I still want to play the nurse.'¹³

Whitehead agreed and this time his relationship with Anderson was a positive one.¹⁴

In Clytemnestra, Anderson held a role that was nearly the equal of Medea but she still had rejected the first contract offered to her by the YGT. The second contract provided for \$3,500 per week, transportation, and accommodation. YGT would be criticized for hiring both Anderson and Bert Lahr at their standard salaries when leading artists at other regional theatres were often quite willing to work for less. A Kresge Foundation appeal written in 1967 seeks to justify this situation.

Several considerations led to the decision to engage these artists at their standard salaries. First, each was ideally suited by experience and ability to give preeminent unique performances. Second, they were of such distinguished international reputations that critical interest was guaranteed. Third, although repeated attempts were made to engage other artists after being initially turned down by both Dame Judith and Mr. Lahr – when lesser salaries were offered – the administration was unable to find any artists of established reputation and appropriate experience willing to accept the roles. Finally, less than five weeks time remained between the Board's decision to attempt the season and the first day of rehearsal. The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was an 'instant' Festival with all the drawbacks and penalties attendant on things done in haste.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gordon Rust, "The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre: An Olympian Ordeal," Foundation Appeal, YGT collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

April 29. The *Ann Arbor News* article that led to Owens' removal from the Chairmanship was published. *Variety* published a very short announcement of the Anderson hiring. The title of the article is indicative of a common New York attitude towards Midwestern theatre, "Judith Anderson Essays 'Oresteia' in Ypsilanti Silo."¹⁶

April 30. The refurbishing work on the Ladies Library began. Eugene Congdon, of Congdon's Ace Hardware, donated glass needed to repair windows. Eva-Dean Elwell, co-chair of the YGT Women's Committee, organized seven members of EMU's Arm of Honor fraternity to do the heavy lifting. They found the nearly derelict building full of cast-off items from many departments of city government, including decrepit street barricades and even an old fire hydrant.¹⁷

May 2. The *Ypsilanti Press* reported that a petition was circulating which sought financial information from the YGT board of directors. It also mentioned that there would be a special meeting that evening "to consider questions being raised" by Clara Owens.¹⁸ At the meeting, the board voted to suspend Owens. They likewise decided to send out a press release stating that, although Owens had been suspended as Chairman of the Board, she was still an active member of the Board of Directors.¹⁹

May 3. John Mayhew sent a letter to every director requesting that all visits to the YGT offices be made only by appointment with Richard Kirschner.²⁰ This letter was clearly aimed at reducing Clara Owens' unannounced visits to YGT headquarters.

Both the *Ann Arbor News* and the *Ypsilanti Press* reported the suspension. The

¹⁶ "Judith Anderson Essays 'Oresteia' in Ypsilanti Silo," *Variety*, 29 April 1966.

¹⁷ Eva-Dean Elwell, interview by author, tape recording, Ypsilanti, MI, 2 June 1999.

¹⁸ "Theatre Members Ask Reports," *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 May 1966.

¹⁹ YGT minutes, 2 May 1966.

²⁰ Mayhew to Director, 3 May 1966, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

Press reached Owens for comment. She told the paper she did not want to hurt the theatre in any way. “‘Of course, I will do anything I can for it,’ she said. ‘I think it is going to go well. Mr. Solomos is a great man and I think we will have a great summer.’” Owens stressed that the reason for her removal was her inability to sign the agreement not to make unauthorized statements to the press “‘and still have any conscience left.’” Her objections, however, did not “‘involve professional matters and there is no implication of the misuse of funds.” She planned to remain active in YGT. “‘I can’t disassociate myself from the theatre,’ [she] said.”²¹

Owens’ comments to the paper sound remarkably calm and cooperative. She was soon writing letters of protest, however. One such letter, undated, seems to have been written about this time. It is divided into five sections, each section headed by the phrase “I protest to the Board of Directors of YGT.” The first section includes complaints about the March 20 meeting, already described, in which Kirschner, Mayhew, and other board members accused Owens of being uncooperative. The second section complains about Kirschner’s removal of the photographs from the YGT offices. The third section reads,

I protest to the Board of Directors of YGT that misstatements have gone out to the Press, all over the U.S. which have caused me and my family, suffering, heartbreak, and loss of prestige. The majority of the Board of Directors of YGT has never voted to suspend me. Eight Directors out of 30 so voted.²²

Her next protest was that she had not received a fair hearing at the May 2 meeting, because the resolution to suspend was prepared before she arrived. She reiterated her belief that “my statement does not bear out the ‘implication that funds are

²¹ “YGT Directors Oust Mrs. Owens,” *Ann Arbor News*, 3 May 1966; “Theatre Board Suspends Mrs. Owens as Chairman in Policies Dispute,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 3 May 1966.

²² Owens to the Board of Directors of YGT, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

being misused.’” Finally, she protested the pressure applied by the board to have her sign a statement agreeing to clear public utterances through YGT public relations. She concluded,

I believe that freedom of speech is mentioned in the Constitution of the U.S. I re-affirm my faith in a great Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, in the continued efforts of Alexis Solomos and Harry Weese, [and] in the public which has given us the necessary funds to mount this summer festival.²³

Owens is correct in her assertion that only eight out of thirty directors voted to suspend her. YGT’s artificial quorum of eleven allowed such a vote to take place with validity. However, the sixteen board members present at the May 2 meeting were the most active members of the board. The other half of the board rarely attended meetings and had little to do with the daily operations of YGT.

May 3 was also the day that the local papers announced the hiring of Bert Lahr to play Pisthetairos in *The Birds*. The *New York Times* followed suit the next day. Lahr had turned down YGT’s initial offer and had little interest in playing in classic repertory. In fact, Bert Lahr looked upon repertory as a last resort, telling his son John, “I guess if I needed to eat, I’d do it.”²⁴ Only a last minute cancellation of another project and a raise in YGT’s offer brought Bert Lahr to Ypsilanti. Lahr, like Dame Judith Anderson, received \$3,500 per week, plus a car, and free hotel accommodations in exchange for his four performances per week.²⁵

May 4. By this time, it is clear that the contracts of Ruby Dee, Donald Davis, and Jacqueline Brookes were finalized, because the *New York Times* article about Lahr mentioned them. Ruby Dee was to play Cassandra in the *Oresteia* and Iris in *The Birds*.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ John Lahr, *Notes on a Cowardly Lion* (New York: Knopf, 1969) 294.

²⁵ Ibid, 296.

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Donald Davis would star opposite Dame Judith as Agamemnon and play the Hoopoe in *The Birds*. Jacqueline Brookes was cast as the leader the chorus of slave women in *The Libation Bearers* and played Athene in *The Eumenides*.²⁶ (See Appendix A for complete program information.)

The *Ypsilanti Press* published an editorial about YGT's internal conflict on this day. Editor James Brown, Jr. called the dispute sad but insisted that the overall concept was not threatened. Owens would characterize this editorial as a "scurrilous personal attack."²⁷ It was hardly that. Brown praised Clara Owens and gave her full credit for starting the theatre. He agreed that, any time any member wanted an accounting of theatre funds, he or she was entitled to it. However, this "should not be a matter of harrassment [*sic*]." He pointed out that, by her own statement, Owens wished to step down as president. Unfortunately, "the other issues Mrs. Owens raises, unhappily, give the impression that she is fighting every move which in any way changes actions taken while she was president."²⁸

This comment is perceptive. Clara Owens charged the board with failing to observe economy but she was hardly stingy with the personnel she had picked for YGT. She defended a large salary for Alexis Solomos and, before the success of the first season had even been tested, agitated for a contract extension for the Greek director. Furthermore, at a time when it was obvious that building a permanent structure was, of necessity, years away from being practicable, she insisted the architect, Harry Weese be consulted at every turn. Mr. Weese and his associates did not travel from Chicago to

²⁶ "Bert Lahr Signed for Role in 'Birds,'" *New York Times*, 4 May 1966.

²⁷ Owens to Donor to the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 17 May 1966, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

²⁸ James Brown, Jr., editorial, "Greek Theatre Dispute Sad, But Concept Not

Ypsilanti to consult with the Greek Theatre free-of-charge. In her open letter to the board, Owens mentions both her handpicked men.

Harry Weese of Chicago – He has given us a tremendous concept of a great modern theatre with a Greek stage. He is being ignored and an Ann Arbor contractor is assuming responsibility for our first season

Alexis Solomos . . . How much attention are you paying to this quiet, scholarly, great artist in your midst? Have you made any arrangements to retain him for two more years?²⁹

James Brown disagreed with Owens that dropping the third play would undermine YGT's effectiveness as a tourist attraction. Instead, he believed that failing to do so might very well undermine YGT's ability to pay enough money to attract the big name stars they needed to make the two Greek plays a strong attraction. As to the Ladies Library, while admitting he might be biased, since he had long advocated the preservation of Ypsilanti's grand Victorian structures, Brown supported the board's decision here as well. He pointed out that nothing in the lease promised any restoration beyond bringing the building up to code. If the money to be spent on the rental of office space could be

. . . spent to keep alive a gracious community landmark – even if only for a short time – then all residents benefit doubly And perhaps by the time the house must go to make way for the theatre, the long-awaited preservation program will have begun and a place will be available for it.³⁰

Brown's editorial generated at least one positive response in the form of a letter to the editor.

Press Editorial regarding Greek Theatre dispute must have been rather hard to compose and publish but it was best to set the record straight. It cannot be denied that Mrs. Clara Owens has worked hard on the project, but her suggestion that the work be spread out in many homes and offices is not too good. An out-of-town dignitary, seeking some

Threatened," *Ypsilanti Press*, 4 May 1966.

²⁹ Owens, Open letter.

³⁰ "Greek Theatre Dispute Sad."

information regarding the theatre, would think it rather strange if he were sent from one sewing room to another, and perhaps on different sides of town.³¹

The letter was signed with the pseudonym, U.R. Rite.

May 9. Dame Judith Anderson arrived in Ypsilanti as her helicopter touched down, in a swirl of dust, on the pitcher's mound of the baseball field where she was to perform. A second helicopter full of television and news photographers followed to record the elaborate welcoming ceremony staged by YGT.

John Mayhew had met Anderson's plane at Willow Run Airport and escorted her during the short helicopter flight to Ypsilanti. As they stepped out onto the ball field, the Eastern Michigan University Band struck up "God Save the Queen" in honor of Anderson's title of Dame Commander of the British Empire. Greetings and gifts were given to Dame Judith by Ypsilanti Mayor Susan Sayre; EMU President Harold Sponberg; Alexis Solomos; and Joan Tyson, a member of the *Oresteia* chorus. Other officials, representing various segments of the community, including the Greek Orthodox Church, the University of Michigan, Ypsilanti Township, and the Chamber of Commerce, were also at the ceremony.

Clara Owens was not present. According to Owens, she was not invited to participate. In her open letter to the board, she complains

A program was printed well in advance, with many guests on it, when our great friend, Judith Anderson, arrived in May 1966. I was not notified nor was I on the program. Yet, I feel that she is a part of me and this community. She came to us in May 1964, with belief in us; and I was the one who asked her to come.³²

Anderson's first words to the welcoming crowd were a quote from *Medea*. "' If I

³¹ Letter to the editor, *Ypsilanti Press*, 10 May 1966.

³² Owens, Open letter.

could find the right words. If some god would lend me a touch of eloquence, I'd show you my heart.'" In addition, she mentioned the "wonder and pride" she felt "at the glory of the dream which Mrs. Clara Owens had for Ypsilanti two years ago."³³

YGT and Eastern Michigan University signed the formal agreement to lease the stadium on this day.³⁴ The Jabbour Building Company began the work on the stadium. Zeke Jabbour had not been too eager to take on the project. 'There was no time. I didn't want to build it because . . . I didn't have the time or the resources. My total resources would have to go into the construction of the theatre." As part of the lease, YGT had to agree that they would in no way disturb the remainder of the college baseball season. Jabbour quietly went about doing the work he could accomplish under this stipulation.

We snuck into the baseball field, during the baseball season, dug footings for the steel, and covered it up with dirt and grass . . . We did the seats beforehand because that interfered with nothing and we did some of the exterior beforehand. We had to bring in a lot more electrical power. We had to bring in a lot more plumbing.³⁵

In the meanwhile, the steel framework, which would support Eldon Elder's sets, was fabricated by Ypsilanti Steel Fabricators.³⁶ The sets themselves were built in Detroit by the J. Max Robertson Studio at great savings to YGT. Jabbour recalls that a bid from a New York firm was about two-and-a-half times more than what YGT paid locally.³⁷

May 11. Tickets for the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre went on sale.³⁸ The *Ypsilanti Press* announced that Bert Lahr would arrive at the train depot on May 14. Theatre

³³ "Judith Anderson 'Enters' Stage Here Via Helicopter," *Ypsilanti Press*, 10 May 1966.

³⁴ "EMU Okays Field for Theatre Use," *Ypsilanti Press*, 9 May 1966.

³⁵ Jabbour interview.

³⁶ Press Release, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 11 June 1966, YGT collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

³⁷ Jabbour interview.

³⁸ YGT minutes, 27 April 1966.

officials encouraged area children to attend the welcoming ceremony.³⁹

May 14. Bert Lahr arrived in Ypsilanti. He was greeted by an Ypsilanti junior high school band's rendition of "Over the Rainbow." Wearing a pith helmet given him by the local Lions club and a lei of Lays brand potato chips around his neck, he saluted the crowd of adults and children who came to welcome him, (Figure 10). The Lions Club had made Lahr an honorary member because of his famous role as the Cowardly Lion in the film, *The Wizard of Oz*. The potato chips capitalized on Lahr's more recent fame as the man on the television commercial who could not resist the dare, "Betcha can't eat just one Lays potato chip."

Clara Owens did not attend these festivities either. John Mayhew wrote her later that day.

I regret that you did not see fit to join us today in welcoming Mr. Bert Lahr As I mentioned to you on the telephone yesterday, this was an important occasion for the Theatre and you belonged in this ceremony. Apart from that, your presence would have contributed to the progress of the theatre.

I had hoped that your abiding interest in the success of YGT would have enabled you to put differences of opinion aside I know I speak for all members of the Board of Directors when I express the wish that you join us on future occasions of this sort The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre is already much bigger than any of the people involved in it. The institution is the only item of consequence in the entire program and your relationship with it should be preserved.⁴⁰

It is odd that the YGT leadership should exclude Clara Owens from one welcoming ceremony and scold her for failing to show up at another. Maybe the true issue was that the YGT planners were unwilling to give Owens a place on either program,

³⁹ "Bert Lahr to Arrive Saturday," *Ypsilanti Press*, 11 May 1966.

⁴⁰ Mayhew to Owens, 14 May 1966, Farres papers.



Figure 10 – Lahr Arriving in Ypsilanti

fearing, perhaps, that she might use it as a platform to air her differences with the board. It could well be that Owens was invited to the Anderson event but, because she was left off the program, declined to attend.

May 15. Clara Owens held a meeting in her home to discuss strategies for manipulating the situation to her advantage. A Detroit attorney, Walter Seymour, was among those present and, the next day, he wrote to Owens with some advice.

It is not completely clear from the context of the letter exactly what matters were addressed at this meeting. Apparently, a contract issued to an officer of the corporation was of some concern. Seymour warned Owens that if Mayhew agreed to “hire an officer for a period of time and give him a contract and then if the Board of Directors sat idly by while enjoying the benefits of his services, the corporation would be responsible for his salary.”⁴¹ It could be Ted Rancont’s contract that was under discussion. Alternatively, it could be the board’s decision to use the Jabbour Building Company that prompted this exchange. Jabbour, however, never received a salary from the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.⁴²

Walter Seymour had some more advice for Owens.

At the meeting in your home last night we apparently agreed to use your reputation and peoples’ confidence in you as a means of bringing pressure of public opinion to bear on the officers of the Theater. If this does not carry enough weight, you may want to discuss legal means with some Ypsi[lanti] or Ann Arbor attorney Meanwhile I think the loyal supporters who responded with donations are entitled to know what’s going on in the theater. A lot of suspicion, based on ignorance, exists. It may hurt the sale of tickets. The public must soon be ‘un-confused’ if we expect their enthusiasm to remain at a high level.⁴³

⁴¹ Seymour to Owens, 16 May 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴² Jabbour interview.

⁴³ Seymour to Owens, 16 May 1966.

This meeting was part of a behind-the-scenes campaign mounted by Clara Owens against the YGT board. It began with the petition signed by the EMU contingent and continued throughout the festival season and beyond. Seymour's advice prompted Owens to wage a public campaign as well. Owens would eventually hold weekly meetings in her house, gathering people to counteract the decisions made by the YGT board. She also had agents within the organization, such as Fred Shaefer and later, Peter Fletcher, who kept her informed about details of internal operation. Judy Rumelhart describes a tense atmosphere in the Ladies Library offices, where people were afraid to speak freely. She and Connie Lacy, the board secretary, joked that they should write a book about YGT. Lacy wanted to title it *Malice in Blunderland*.⁴⁴

May 17. The *Ypsilanti Press* reported that ticket sales were going well in the first week. "About 1,100 season tickets have been sold with the local response 'encouraging.'"⁴⁵ It would not be long, however, before the news from the box office became discouraging.

A letter to the editor, published in the *Ypsilanti Press* this day, proves that the stadium decision still rankled some in the community.

Mr. [Bud] Abbott has requested that land and \$2,650 be obtained for construction of a ball diamond. What would be wrong if the Greek Theatre were to fade the entire tab out of the bundle they are saving by grabbing Briggs Field? It could serve as a monument and reminder of the great undertaking. Recently we responded to a cry for 300 Grand, so come now Greek, U. Divyup.⁴⁶

It was also on this day that Clara Owens began her efforts to "un-confuse" the public. She sent a letter to all the donors to YGT. In it, she itemized five points with

⁴⁴ Rumelhart interview.

⁴⁵ "Theatre Ticket Sales Going Well," *Ypsilanti Press*, 17 May 1966.

⁴⁶ Letter to the editor, *Ypsilanti Press*, 17 May 1966.

which she differed from the YGT board. The first point urged donors to encourage the board to seek a contract with Alexis Solomos “for another year or two, providing him with complete control over the productions.” Secondly, Owens stressed that YGT “should continue to rely upon the Weese firm for the future home of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.” Once again, Owens was concerned that choices she made when she was president were being superseded by the current YGT administration.

Owens also had some accusations to make, as the next two items attest. She told the donors

I believe that you did not make your contribution . . . with any intent that those funds should be expended upon the temporary restoration of a condemned building under the pretense that this is the sole means of obtaining office space

I believe that the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre must have a budgetary plan which is continually checked by rigorous controls, with frequent reports to you about the specific manner in which your funds are being expended, and I am dismayed at the lavish waste of your contributions.⁴⁷

It seems highly likely that the last statement would have a negative effect on future contributions.

Owens’ final charge was that the YGT board had abdicated its powers to “a new President who has sole authority over every step of this enterprise through [only] two committees.” According to Owens, this situation had “already proven dangerous” and Kirschner was taking advantage of it by paying accounts with two or more checks under \$1,000 without an officer’s countersignature. She concluded her letter by urging donors to support the performances that summer but to become better informed “about what is happening to the dream we shared.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Owens to Donor to the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 17 May 1966.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* (emphasis in original).

May 18. The YGT board of directors met, sans Owens, and blithely unaware of the letter wending its way to their donor base. There were several items of importance on the agenda, the most significant being Richard Kirschner's long awaited budget.

The production committee and Kirschner proposed that the fiscal year be divided into three parts: 1) a winter operating period from the end of the season until April 24; 2) a production period from April 24 until June 15; 3) an operating period from June 15 until September 4. The board approved this plan and Kirschner presented them with a budget for the seven week production period only. The grand total for this period was \$434,634.

This budget generated a lengthy discussion. Two items in particular came under scrutiny. In the copy of the budget provided to the board, the cost of the renovation of the stadium was left blank. Teddy Farres' copy has the amount of \$83,643 handwritten under this heading and that amount is factored into the \$434, 634 total. On the same page, the Library renovation is budgeted for \$4,320. The production committee had arrived at this figure by multiplying what would have been a bargain rental price of \$120 per month by a projected 36-month occupancy.⁴⁹

The method of arriving at this budgeted amount for the Ladies Library renovation was somewhat disingenuous. A three-year occupancy projection seems overly optimistic, even without the benefit of hindsight. If events had proceeded according to plan, the Ladies Library would have been scheduled for demolition within two years, not three. The actual amount spent on the renovation was \$900 less than the budgeted total. However, YGT did not occupy the Ladies Library for anything close to three years.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 18 May 1966, Farres papers.

Though they could not have known it in May 1966, YGT would be forced to move out of the Ladies Library after only thirteen months.⁵⁰ The real cost per month of the building to YGT was \$262. Hindsight proves Clara Owens right; office space could have been found for much less in downtown Ypsilanti in the spring of 1966.

A letter to the editor of the *Ypsilanti Press* published the same day as this board meeting spoke to this very point. Mary Olariu wrote

I was struck by your statement that even if the old library is restored to serve as YGT offices, it might in the end have to be demolished. It seems a poor business tactic to remodel a building which will ultimately be razed. Wouldn't it be better if YGT rented for office purposes one of the three or four empty buildings fronting Michigan [Avenue] in downtown Ypsilanti? People who have sponsored the Greek Theatre would prefer to see their money used for the Greek Theatre and not for the restoration of old buildings for Project '73.⁵¹

James Brown, Jr. replied in an editor's note that there was no major restoration project planned for the building. The "clean up and rehabilitation" expenses were expected to be "well under the cost the theatre would have to pay for rent."⁵²

The production budget total left the Greek Theatre \$150,000 short of what they needed to complete the season. However, the board minutes do not indicate any discussion of abandoning the project. Indeed, with so many contract commitments in place, YGT was at a point of no return. They could only go forward with the season and hope for the best.

A letter from Peter Fletcher to John Mayhew was also on the agenda of this board meeting. Fletcher challenged Mayhew's statement at the May 2 meeting that the petition

⁵⁰ Combined Chamber, IDC, and Greek Theatre Committee Minutes, 1 March 1967, Farres papers.

⁵¹ Mary Olariu to the Editor of the *Ypsilanti Press*, *Ypsilanti Press*, 18 May 1966.

⁵² Ibid.

for financial information was illegal.

May I ask, in what way was the petition illegal?

May I further ask, why is the public meeting being postponed for such an unconsonable [*sic*] time? . . .

An audit was not demanded, or requested. No question was raised as to embezzlement or loss of funds. A question was raised as to *how* funds were being used [T]his can be answered surely by the Executive Director who is in charge of all expenditures?

Since a budget has been prepared by the Executive Director he must be in a position to explain and defend it, and also the expenses he has incurred to date.

May I respectfully suggest that the President . . . of the Board of Directors of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, a public trust, non-profit, tax-exempt, fulfill the spirit of the by-laws and call a meeting of the corporate body *at once*.⁵³

According to the board minutes, “during the discussion [of Fletcher’s letter], it was brought out that a number of the petitioners had requested that their names be withdrawn from the petition.” The veracity of this assertion is impossible to determine. The few signatories who could be contacted did not even remember the petition, let alone signing it and later asking to have their signatures withdrawn. Mayhew requested that board members, Fred Shaefer and Tom Kentes, “investigate this situation further.” That constituted the only board action taken at the time.⁵⁴

Zeke Jabbour gave the board a report on the progress of the stadium conversion. This sparked another vote of confidence for Jabbour and the work his company was doing. Nonetheless, Jabbour recalls that this “confidence” was not deeply held by either himself or the rest of the YGT board.

They kept asking me, ‘Can you do it?’

I said, ‘I don’t know! All I can do is try.’

They wanted assurances and sometimes they’d get mad at me for not saying it could be done. I didn’t know it could be done. It took an

⁵³ Fletcher to Mayhew, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (emphasis in original).

⁵⁴ YGT minutes, 18 May 1966.

extraordinary effort on the part of all the guys involved.⁵⁵

May 19. News of Owens' letter to donors prompted John Mayhew to call a special meeting of the board on May 23 to deal with the situation. James Brown, Jr. dealt with another negative letter about YGT in the editorial section of his *Ypsilanti Press*.

The letter writer, Mr. D.C. Ellis, was certain that the *Press* had failed to publish all the facts "about 'The Group' that organized and 'jammed the Greek Theatre down the throats' of the local people." Ellis asked the paper to answer questions about nine different issues. Brown printed the letter and addressed each issue in turn. The result filled over half of the day's editorial page. Brown told his readers that he had 'gone into considerable detail here to answer Mr. Ellis' questions because they seem to cover just about every rumor, challenge and innuendo going around. They should be publicly aired and we are thankful to Mr. Ellis for writing."⁵⁶

Ellis' first issue was with Tom Patterson: what had he done for the Greek Theatre; how much had he been paid; why had no explanation been given "for his quiet disappearance;" what was his opinion of the project and "The Group." Brown replied that Patterson had been hired for \$500 per week for six months to conduct the "unsuccessful national fund drive." His contract, as the press reported at the time, had not been renewed by "mutual agreement." Finally, if by "The Group" Mr. Ellis meant the citizens serving on the YGT board, "since they did not offer to renew Mr. Patterson's contract, we can only guess at his opinion of them."⁵⁷

These responses to Ellis, and two other responses, raise questions about how

⁵⁵ Jabbour interview.

⁵⁶ "Yes, It Is a Gamble: A Good One! And Discord Inevitable," editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 19 May 1966.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

much Brown knew about the Greek Theatre's internal affairs and whether he was deliberately withholding information to protect YGT. YGT's press release in October 1965 had stated that the relationship with Patterson had ended by mutual agreement, but was Brown unaware of Patterson's mysterious "conduct the night of October 18" which led the board to terminate his employment?⁵⁸ Neither Brown, nor any other *Ypsilanti Press* employee was on the YGT board in 1965, so it is possible that Brown was unaware of the details of Patterson's departure from YGT.

Ellis' second item of contention also produced what might be a disingenuous reply from Brown. Ellis asked why "a previous group was denied the old library – but the Greek Theatre can have it for one dollar a year?" Brown referred Ellis and his readers back to the historical society's request that the city council delay razing the building so that the society could explore means of moving it. No final action had been taken by council on this request but, according to Brown, the Greek theatre occupancy would at least halt the "deterioration and extreme vandalizing of the building."⁵⁹ Yet, the historical society's request for delay came only after several proposals to use the building for a museum or, at the very least, for storage of the historical collection, had been turned down by council. Brown must have been aware of this. His paper had reported the results of those council meetings.

Ellis' next two questions dealt with the Briggs Field controversy. Brown referred Ellis back to his previous editorial; reminded him that the field would have been destroyed soon, in any case, by Eastern Michigan University to make way for new construction; and told Ellis of an escrow fund created by YGT to guarantee repairs for

⁵⁸ Owens to Patterson, 23 October 1965.

⁵⁹ "Yes, It Is a Gamble."

any damage to field in the meantime.⁶⁰

Ellis also wanted to know how much of YGT's money was being spent in the Ypsilanti area. Brown replied that some major expenditures including the architect's fees, the consulting fees for the unsuccessful fund drive, and salaries such as Mr. Patterson's had gone outside of the community. The bulk of the money for the season itself, however, would go to salaries of the cast and production team, who would live and spend the money in Ypsilanti.⁶¹

Ellis' seventh item of contention reads

Why does Ypsilanti sponsor this Greek project? What's the matter with American culture, American artists and all of the American talent that has been envied by all of the world? Ypsilanti, Michigan is still located in the United States – but it's hard to believe sometimes.⁶²

One can hear an echo of "you get your God-damned foreign theatre out of our baseball diamond," in these questions.⁶³ Brown replied,

Ypsilanti is named for a famous Greek general, and this in no way decreases our Americanism Similarly, Stratford, [Ontario], for example, capitalized on its connection with Shakespeare to create an outstanding successful summer festival. The unusualness of the Ypsilanti appeal already has been shown by the nation-wide publicity it has received; that and quality production are, in fact, the theatre's greatest hope of success as a national attraction.⁶⁴

Ellis' next point of dispute produced an empathetic response from the editor of the *Ypsilanti Press*. Ellis wrote, "A picture of the future Greek Theatre shows a building with a pagoda top. Is this supposed to be a four million dollar joke?" To which Brown replied, "We agree fully with Mr. Ellis on the proposed permanent theatre. It may be fine

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ypsilanti UAW local president as quoted in Rumelhart interview.

⁶⁴ "Yes, It Is a Gamble."

architecturally, but for a Greek Theatre? The plans are not final, and here, for one, is a vote that they be changed to more classic lines.”⁶⁵

The final set of questions prompted the third of Brown’s potentially less than above board responses. Ellis charged that a “costly survey paid for by the Greek Theatre group pointed out that Greek culture would appeal to only a few people. Why, then, did our council still give this group the park, Briggs Field and the old library? Why weren’t these facilities kept for the majority?” This seems to be a reference to the Brakeley Feasibility study; the only survey paid for by YGT. James Brown, Jr. certainly was aware of the Brakeley report. His paper published an article and received an unsigned letter to the editor about the report in late April of 1965. Yet, Brown’s rejoinder to Ellis’ query was “We don’t know of the survey Mr. Ellis cites. We emphasized in every editorial supporting the fund appeal that whether the Greek theatre would draw was an unanswered question . . . that the festival this summer was, in fact, a gamble.”⁶⁶

There is no absolute proof that Brown was deliberately deceiving his readers. It is clear, however, that YGT had a staunch and influential ally in James Brown, Jr. The editor urged his readers not to be discouraged by “the divisions which have arisen within the board or between segments of the community.” Discord was inevitable in a project such as this. “So let’s not walk fearfully, depressed by division or rumor. Instead, let us move forward to meet one of the most exciting and challenging periods any community ever faced.”⁶⁷

May 20. Brown’s opinion notwithstanding, reducing discord and moving forward

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

did not seem to be a priority for Clara Owens. She responded this day to his editorial with a letter of her own. Brown printed her letter to the editor in its entirety five days later on May 25. In her letter, Owens reiterated the high cost of moving the Ladies Library and asked about the “hidden costs” of restoring the building. By the time Owens’ letter was published, however, YGT’s move to the Ladies Library was complete. Brown appended an editor’s note to the Owens letter, telling his readers that the costs of “refurbishing” the building were estimated to be under \$4,000.⁶⁸

Owens wrote another letter on 20 May 1966. This one was addressed “to whom it may concern.”⁶⁹ Apparently, a representative from the Greek Embassy had called Owens and asked her why they had not received a picture of her as they had requested. She called Ted Rancont and he told Owens that he had been unable to find any pictures in the YGT files. Sure that there were photographs available, Owens went to the YGT offices after working hours to find them.⁷⁰ Owens wrote of her visit to the offices in this letter.

I came down to the office to obtain an address. There was constant surveillance by Mr. Kirschner. He moved from room to room as I did. Since the files are in various places, I found it necessary to be in three rooms from time to time. I was followed and watched. I found a folder of pictures of me, marked as such and in a file with other photographs.⁷¹

Any semblance of cooperation between Owens and the YGT leadership seems to have completely dissipated by this point. An atmosphere of mistrust prevailed.

May 23. The YGT board of directors met to discuss Clara Owens’ letter to the donors. Owens was not present at the meeting. Unable to prevent Owens from waging

⁶⁸ Owens to the editor, “Challenges Starkweather Use,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 25 May 1966.

⁶⁹ Owens to Whom It May Concern, 20 May 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁷⁰ Owens, Open letter.

⁷¹ Owens to Whom It May Concern, 20 May 1966.

her own negative publicity campaign, the board decided to try to get a more positive perspective out to the donors on the mailing list. The practice of issuing a weekly newsletter was adopted and University of Michigan classics professor and YGT board member, Marvin Felheim, was appointed as its editor. It was decided that the first issue should “emphasize that Mrs. Owens is still a member of the Board of Directors.” It was also resolved that as soon as the actual costs of renovating the Ladies Library were known, this information should be released to the local newspapers.⁷²

Zeke Jabbour gave a progress report on the stadium conversion. With the end of Eastern Michigan University’s baseball season still a week away, only work which would not interfere with the games had been undertaken. Dressing rooms and restrooms were under construction. The grounds were to be lit by donated gaslights, which were currently being installed. Arrangements had also been made to rent the modern equivalent of a Greek “flying machine” from the New York based Peter Feller Company of *Peter Pan* fame.⁷³ This special effect was required for Ruby Dee’s entrance as the goddess Iris in *The Birds*.

James Gousseff reported for the production committee that costume construction was well underway and that the scenery for the *Oresteia* was completed and ready for use as soon as the stadium could be completed. In addition, the sound equipment had “undergone considerable testing” and would actually cost less than the budgeted amount of \$5,000.⁷⁴ These, and other production elements of the 1966 festival season, will be examined in fuller detail later.

⁷² Minutes of the Special Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 23 May 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The final discussion of the evening involved ticket sales. Kirschner told the board that sales were “going very well.” Currently, they were available by mail order and telephone. The local box office was scheduled to open June 1. Advertisements were scheduled for publication in the next issues of *Time* and *Life* magazines and in the *New York Times*.⁷⁵

Donald Britton, the YGT box office treasurer, was excited by the initial sales response. In an interview with an *Ypsilanti Press* reporter, he predicted a sellout season. Over \$15,000 worth of tickets were sold in advance of the local box office opening. Season brochures were sent to various mailing lists, most of them donated to YGT by “cooperative managements of other theatres.” Two examples include the University of Michigan’s Association of Producing Artists and the Fisher Theatre of Detroit. Joseph Nederlander was managing director of the Fisher and a Greek Theatre board member, though his involvement with YGT was sporadic at best. He supplied the budding Ypsilanti theatre with a list of over ten thousand names and a personal letter urging support of YGT.⁷⁶

May 24. The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre moved into its new offices in the hastily refurbished Ladies Library. Their former quarters on Michigan Avenue were retained as box office facilities.⁷⁷

May 25. Judith Anderson made a promotional appearance for YGT on NBC’s “Tonight Show.” Jerry Lewis was guest hosting the show for Johnny Carson. Lewis’ attitude toward the project offended some Ypsilanti locals.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Ticket Sales Beat ‘My Fair Lady,’” *Ypsilanti Press*, 1 June 1966.

⁷⁷ “New Office Opens, Building Starts,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 24 May 1966.

Apparently, Lewis was more interested in scoring laughs than in interviewing Dame Judith about the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Teddy Farres was particularly unhappy. "It was terrible! It was embarrassing. I was embarrassed because [Jerry Lewis is] not the fellow who should have interviewed [Dame Judith] You know how he is. I don't know how she took that Johnny Carson would have been good with her."⁷⁸

Evidently, Anderson was occasionally able to direct the conversation to the Greek Theatre. She told the large television audience that the theatre was important not just to Ypsilanti but "to the whole nation." She slipped in a brief history of the project and mentioned Clara Owens as the idea's originator. She concluded her appearance with a reading from *Macbeth*.⁷⁹

May 26. This was the last day of the EMU baseball season. Zeke Jabbour and his men finally had unfettered access to the stadium site (Figure 11). They had just five days to ready the space for rehearsal, just nineteen days until the first public preview performance. Incredibly, they succeeded and YGT literature and press reports dubbed the effort a miracle.

The game ended around five in the afternoon. As the last out was made, "shortstop to first, four men with shovels leaped the parapet separating the stands from the field." They immediately began digging in the infield to reveal the "enormous concrete footings with steel templates" concealed there a month earlier.⁸⁰ "Before startled players could leave the field . . . a truck loaded with structural steel roared onto

⁷⁸ Farres interview.

⁷⁹ "Judith Anderson Praises Ypsilanti on TV Show."

⁸⁰ Zeke Jabbour, "Capsule History of Y.G.T.," Farres papers.



Figure 11 – Briggs Stadium Before Conversion

the playing field, a grader rounded a corner and a mobile crane rumbled onto the site.”⁸¹

Zeke Jabbour fondly remembers that, as this frenetic operation began, a small boy, who had come to watch the Eastern Michigan University Hurons play, stared bug-eyed at the men clearing dirt away from the steel footings. Jabbour is sure this awe-struck urchin “thought all baseball fields had these things.”⁸²

The beams rose quickly (Figure 12 and 13) and as soon as they were in place the pre-fabricated set pieces were attached to the stable steel structure. Jabbour recalls that his men

worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week. That’s a lot of work and it’s expensive that way because it’s a lot of overtime. And there was no time to do anything. I would stay up three days at a time frequently, because we had no plans. (*Laughing.*) At night we’d sketch stuff and during the day I’d try to have [the men] execute them [*sic*] and then I’d collapse for sixteen hours, or twelve hours, or whatever, and then start over again.⁸³

One hundred and nineteen separate operations were executed before the first on-stage rehearsal was held on May 31. A YGT promotional piece boasts,

For seven days a week, from seven in the morning until seven in the evening, sometimes longer, through holidays and heat, a small army of workmen, too numerous to avoid interference and conflict of purpose, labored as men possessed, without visible strain and without a voice raised in anger. It was a peerlessly professional performance. Olympus must, indeed, have been smiling on Ypsilanti, for during the entire construction period, not a single day was lost because of weather.⁸⁴

Asked if the phrase, “without a voice raised in anger,” was not a bit of hyperbole, Jabbour replied, “I think it was [really true] . . . we had guys tumbling all over one

⁸¹ Press Release, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 11 June 1966, YGT collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

⁸² Jabbour interview.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Capsule History of Y.G.T.”





Figure 12 – Erection of Steel Beams in Stadium

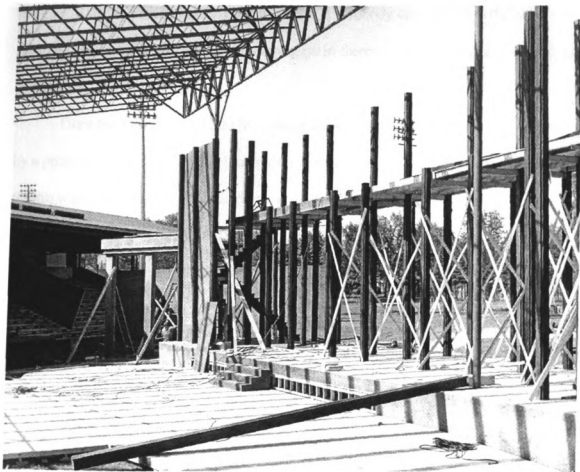


Figure 13 – Steel Beams in Place

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another. They were remarkably good-natured Nobody complained to me about another sub[-contractor]. We had all these guys in there at once. You usually do [work] sequentially.”⁸⁵

Once the actors moved into the nascent theatre, workers were further hampered by a proscription against making loud noises during rehearsal times. Nevertheless, the theatre was finished in time for the preview opening, June 14. Final touches to the grounds were completed in time for the first press opening, June 28.

Jabbour is proud of the outcome of this extraordinary effort.

I can remember Harold Sponberg, [president of EMU], walking up to the theatre. And I expected World War II music – you know – I felt so proud with all the flags waving. [The facility] looked good. It got great reviews. I mean it got extraordinary reviews.⁸⁶

The grounds of the theatre were attractive. The stadium was located on the western edge of the central campus. A significant amount of landscaping was done to create a pleasant approach to the theatre. The main entryway was from a gate on Forest Avenue. A “delightful, wide path [led] through a scenic section with wooded areas and gentle slopes.”⁸⁷ The path was paved with white gravel and lit by old-fashioned gaslights on posts. The grounds included a fountain and a wishing well. Huge rocks were brought in to surround this area. One reporter described it as a “small mountain.” Of the wishing well, Jabbour commented, “ ‘I needed an architectural element that wouldn’t cost any money. And the only thing that would pay for itself was the wishing well.’ ”⁸⁸

The exterior of the stadium bleachers was enclosed with redwood panels. The

⁸⁵ Jabbour interview.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Wood, Greenery Will Transform Greek Theatre,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 27 May 1966.

⁸⁸ Jerome Aumente, “Curtains Part at Ypsilanti Greek Theater,” *Detroit News*, 29 June 1966.

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stadium itself was painted with the national colors of Greece, blue and white. The space between the roofline and the seats was enclosed with “blue, white, and charcoal screening.”⁸⁹ A marquee covered the approach to box office windows. Blue and white petunias flanked the entryway.⁹⁰

Green indoor/outdoor carpeting covered the entrance into the house. The dugouts and the cement parapet wall were also disguised and softened somewhat by the same material.⁹¹ Zeke Jabbour had purchased, for five dollars each, 210 old theatre seats made of contoured plastic from the University of Michigan’s surplus. These were installed between the original bleachers and the stage and sold as box seats.

To make the 1,710 bleacher seats more comfortable, Jabbour found some two-inch foam padding on sale and bought powder blue vinyl to cover it. The theatre also purchased a number of portable seat backs known as boat seats. One of the Greek Theatre’s more unusual concessions was the rental of these for fifty cents apiece to those patrons unwilling to sit for three hours without any back support.⁹²

The third-base dugout (stage right) sheltered the fifteen-piece orchestra. The first-base dugout (stage left) housed the stage manager, and the light and sound board operators. Between these two structures, the circular *orkestra* jutted out towards the audience (Figure 14).

Steel girders extended from the roof of the stadium up to the top of the nearly four story *skene*. Hundreds of lighting instruments were suspended from this grid and clear fiber-reinforced plastic was attached to the top of the trusses. The plastic was intended to

⁸⁹ “Wood, Greenery.”

⁹⁰ Virginia McIntosh, “All Kinds Attend 1st Staging,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 15 June 1966.

⁹¹ “Wood, Greenery.”

⁹² Jabbour interview.

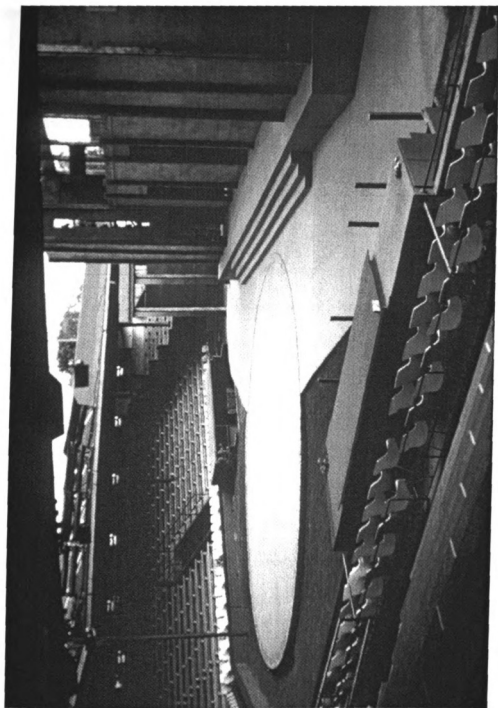


Figure 14 – Stadium Theatre: *Orchestra View*

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protect equipment, actors, and audience from rain and still allow the audience to see the sky as Alexis Solomos insisted. Zeke Jabbour describes this plastic covering as the least successful thing he conceived for the theatre:

It didn't prevent the rain from coming in at all. Well, I shouldn't say at all. It did. It provided some preliminary protection. If you were on stage and it started to rain, it didn't rain on you. But, first of all, rain comes in from different angles and secondly, [the plastic] could only hold so much water up there. It would leak. It wouldn't leak entirely. A lot of it would run off because it was sloped. But we didn't have many rains, thank goodness.⁹³

The stage itself was surprisingly similar in dimension to the one conceived by Harry Weese for the proposed permanent theatre. The *orquestra* was forty-two feet in diameter instead of forty-four.⁹⁴ It was not on the bare grass of the infield, but rather was supported by wooden flooring. Equity requirements for a dancing chorus dictated that a dance floor be used. YGT received an exemption from this rule.⁹⁵ Instead, they were allowed to cover the wooden base with a special carpet made of ozite.⁹⁶ This unusual flooring extended up stage right and left of the *orquestra* to post and lintel *paradoi*, each with a central post, much like the *paradoi* at the theatre of Epidaurus (Figure 15 and 16).

The *proskenium*, or stage, behind the *orquestra* was narrower but deeper than the stage in the Weese design, measuring eighty feet wide by twenty feet deep. It ran across the infield along the first to third base line. Above this thirty-two inch high platform, the *skene* rose thirty-three-and-a-half feet.⁹⁷ Steps leading down into the *orquestra* ran the full length of the *proskenium*.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ YGT press release, 11 June 1966.

⁹⁵ Gousseff interview.

⁹⁶ "Curtains Part."

⁹⁷ YGT press release, 11 June 1966.

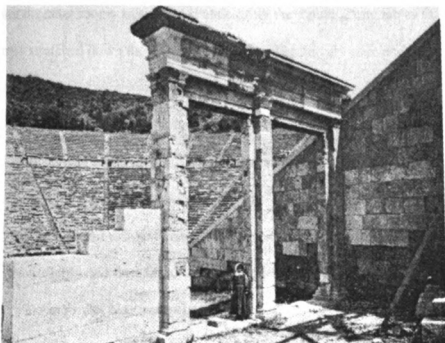


Figure 15 – *Parados* at Theatre of Epidauros

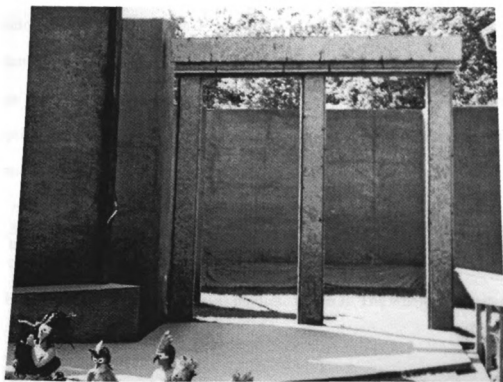


Figure 16 – Eldon Elder's *Parodos* for YGT

Large, long dressing rooms were located underneath the stands. Long tables furnished with mirrors stretched down the center of the room. The mirrors were another of Zeke Jabbour's second-hand purchases from University of Michigan surplus supplies.⁹⁸ New plumbing had been installed for showers and bathrooms. There was room for costume storage as well. A covered walkway around the outside of the stadium led from the dressing rooms to the back of the stage (Figure 17). Three air-conditioned trailers behind the stage provided further dressing room facilities. Two smaller trailers were reserved for the stars, Dame Judith and Bert Lahr. A larger trailer was home for the "featured actresses." Provision was also made for a green room.⁹⁹

On May 28, just two days into this remarkable transformation of the baseball stadium, the first Ypsilanti Greek Theatre newsletter was mailed to the donor list. It was accompanied by a letter from YGT president, John Mayhew. Contrary to the board resolution on May 23, Clara Owens' name is not mentioned at all in the cover letter or the newsletter. Instead, Marvin Felheim, the newsletter's editor, tried to counteract the damage done by Owens' public campaign against the board through positively phrased descriptions of the stadium conversion and the move to the Ladies Library. Careful not to mention remodeling or restoration, Felheim told his readers of the

refurnishing of the old library building to allow YGT cheap, but very glamorous office space Ultimately, the cost, thanks to donations of time and effort by many, including the local utilities companies, will be cheaper than renting space elsewhere in the city.¹⁰⁰

Felheim's second newsletter was published June 3. The whole newsletter is

⁹⁸ Jabbour interview.

⁹⁹ "Woods, Greenery."

¹⁰⁰ Marvin Felheim, "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Newsletter," YGT collection, EMU Archives (emphasis added).

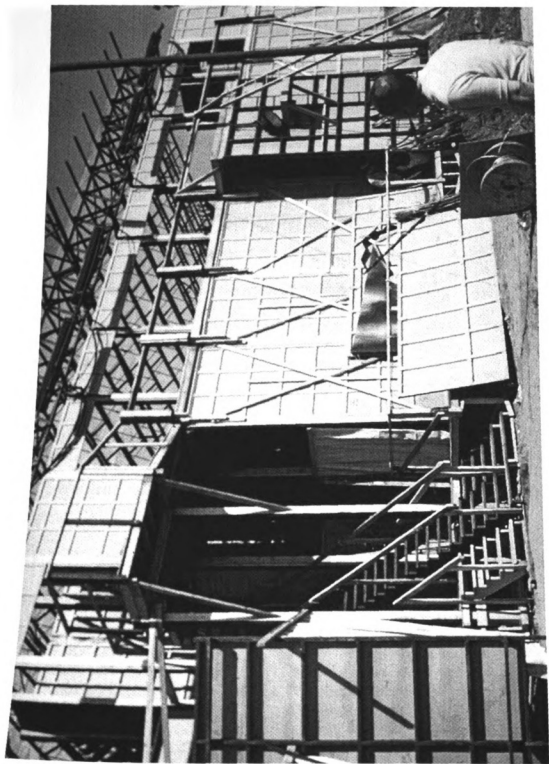


Figure 17 – Backstage View of Eldon Elder's Set

devoted to a description of the rehearsals of each production. Either Felheim indulged in a bit of poetic license or some accommodations had been made to allow the workmen to make noise during rehearsal time, because the newsletter begins, "On stage at last! Carpenter' hammers punctuate Cassandra's cries. But nothing can destroy the thrill of the terrible tragedy of Agamemnon. A power-saw merely accentuates the inevitable."¹⁰¹

At this point, only the *Oresteia* cast was rehearsing on stage.¹⁰² *The Birds* cast was still stuck in the Ypsilanti Armory, where heat and reverberation made rehearsal conditions miserable.¹⁰³ The first preview performance of *The Birds* was scheduled five days after the first performance of the *Oresteia*. Perhaps it was thought that, since there was less time to prepare the *Oresteia*, that cast had a greater need to be in the theatre. There is some evidence, however, that the production of the *Oresteia* received more attention from Alexis Solomos than *The Birds* did.

According to James Gousseff,

At one point, [Solomos] wanted out of directing *The Birds* and just to direct the *Oresteia* and more or less just peek in on *The Birds*. They were talked out of that one on the basis of the politics of the professional theatre. They had thought that I could direct *The Birds*. I told them Bert Lahr would not do this. Solomos was prepared for Dame Judith to be the difficult one to work with and it wasn't. Sir Bert was the difficult one.¹⁰⁴

This account is confirmed somewhat in John Lahr's biography of his father. "The director, Alexis Solomos, who made his reputation directing Greek comedy, sent assistants to block Lahr's show, a Greek custom that confounded the American star."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Marvin Felheim, "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Newsletter 2," YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Eileen M. Harrison, "A Day with Solomos Starts the Night Before," *Ypsilanti Press*, 27 May 1966.

¹⁰⁴ Gousseff interview.

¹⁰⁵ *Cowardly Lion*, 296.

Another point of contention between Bert Lahr and Alexis Solomos during the rehearsal process was the translation used for the production. It seems that Lahr had accepted the role on the basis of drama critic Walter Kerr's translation of *The Birds*. The YGT production used the William Arrowsmith version. John Lahr contends that Alexis Solomos had changed his choice of translation based on the "advice of a Michigan classics professor." This is a reference to either Professor Marvin Felheim or Professor Gerald Else, both of whom Solomos thanked for their "long deliberations . . . [over] many literary questions pertaining to Greek Drama in its American voyage."¹⁰⁶

Trouble with the script came because,

Lahr found the translation unactable, hollow instead of sensual, antique where it should have been current. 'It was stilted and dull. It wasn't funny; there weren't any jokes in it. I understand that in Greek comedy the comedian was supposed to take charge and do anything he wanted in the play.' With this vague historical mandate, Lahr instituted his own changes.¹⁰⁷

Lahr's interpolations were as extensive as his respect for the play was limited.

When asked by a reporter, " 'How did you find Aristophanes' lines in a play that old?'" he humbly replied, "'I rewrote nearly all of them or otherwise it would have been pretty dull. All the laughs I got were my own.'"¹⁰⁸

Lahr had additional objections to the translation. He was uncomfortable with the sexual and scatological content of the language.

Some of the lines in the translation are salacious; and I thought they would offend the audience. There's such a thing as doing double entendre cleverly. You couldn't say 'shit' or 'fart' and do it subtly, could you? I had to say other things. Ruby Dee played the goddess Iris, and one of my lines to her was, 'You sail my way again and I'll lay my course up your beautiful legs; and believe me you'll be one flabbergasted goddess when

¹⁰⁶ "Solomos' Farewell Lauds Effort of Town, Cast," *Ypsilanti Press*, 1 August 1966.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 297.

¹⁰⁸ Doc Greene, "Bert Lahr Has a Word or Two," *Detroit News*, 15 July 1966.

you feel the triple ram of this old hulk.’ Having a following of children through *The Wizard of Oz* and the commercials, I thought it would hurt my career, so I refused to do it. The director insisted that I speak the lines. Well, I did it for one performance in our first preview. Every time I said these words, you could feel a natural tenseness and an absolute silence in the audience. No laughter – nothing. The next day the Ypsilanti paper came out and said the play was not only vulgar but totally unacceptable to the audience in Ypsilanti, which I knew it would be. It was a church-going community, and I was almost sure that, if these words weren’t deleted, the ministers would go to their pulpits and preach against it. I had no recourse but to call Equity.¹⁰⁹

Actually, Bert Lahr overstates his case a bit here. The *Ypsilanti Press* article, written by staff drama critic, Eileen Harrison, was almost completely positive. The headline read, “Comedy Strong, Rough, Racy.” Harrison told her readers,

There was fun in the script and the audience enjoyed watching for the allusions to modern politics which apparently haven’t changed too much since Aristophanes wrote the play 2,380 years ago. Present day language, however, is not quite so uninhibited as it apparently was in early Athens. Thus, though the play is a delightful fantasy, it isn’t meant for children. It isn’t that the language is just suggestive, in spots it is simply vulgar.¹¹⁰

This is hardly the pulpit-thumping condemnation described by Lahr.

Nevertheless, Lahr did protest to Actor’s Equity. Equity had a by-law that stated that no member could be forced to read salacious material. The union upheld Lahr’s protest and Solomos was forced to allow Lahr’s expurgation of the text.¹¹¹ The controversy generated some national press and some criticism of Lahr. The most scathing reproach came from John Ciardi of the *Saturday Review*. He scoffed at Lahr’s claim that he was trying to protect children in the audience.

You go ahead and clean up what is already pure in heart, sir, but you won’t be selling me any tickets for my brats. Before I take them to

¹⁰⁹ *Cowardly Lion*, 297-8.

¹¹⁰ Eileen M. Harrison, “Comedy Strong, Rough, Racy,” review of *The Birds* as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Ypsilanti Press*, 20 June 1966.

¹¹¹ “Bert Lahr’s Nix of ‘Barnyard’ Classics,” *Variety*, 29 June 1966.

anybody's Greek theater I mean to insist that it be Greek. I know you mean well – or I am willing to pretend I believe so – but I insist on believing that Aristophanes meant better. I hope it won't seem an unfriendly thing to say, but I prefer his sensibilities to yours, if only because there may just be a bit of sentimental arrogance in the assumption that your excisions are more civilized than his inclusions.¹¹²

However, according to chorus member William Cross, Bert Lahr was not the only cast member uncomfortable with the scatological and sexually explicit language. Jack Fletcher played Euelpides, sidekick to Lahr's Pisthetairos (Figure 18). Cross asserts that much of the rough language fell to Fletcher. "There were some words that didn't need to be there. It was dirty as hell It was eventually cut . . . and Jack was in relief, because he hated to say it."¹¹³

Conflict over the script was not the only source of tension in *The Birds* rehearsals. Lahr was upset that Solomos sent assistants to block the show and he had little respect for the Greek director. This lack of regard made Lahr difficult to direct. Of his attitude towards directors, Lahr has said, "I'm not hard to direct, in fact I welcome direction; I search for knowledge, but not from people I know more than."¹¹⁴ These feelings do not seem to have been mutual, however. Alexis Solomos wrote a letter to the editor of *Time* magazine when news of Bert Lahr's death, on 15 December 1967, reached the director at his home in Athens.

Sir: I was deeply moved by Bert Lahr's death. Having directed the late star in Aristophanes' comedy, *The Birds* . . . I feel obliged to express my sympathy to all of the Americans for the loss of that comic genius.

His performance of Pisthetairos in *The Birds* was, I believe, his last great role, as well as his first encounter with that other genius, Aristophanes. It was a thrilling experience to watch, during rehearsals,

¹¹² John Ciardi, "On Purifying the Antiquities or the Greeks Had More Words for It than You Are Going to Hear in Ypsilanti, at Least While Bert Lahr Is on Stage," *Saturday Review*, 13 August 1966, 22.

¹¹³ Cross interview.

¹¹⁴ *Cowardly Lion*, 288.



Figure 18 – Bert Lahr and Jack Fletcher in Rehearsal

these two giants of humor and hilarity fight against each other for predominance – striking at each other with totally different weapons of method, language, mentality, even decency – to establish a comic point that was, fundamentally, common to them both.

The scenic result of that titanic clash was a novelty and a rarity. The actor emerged as Bird Lahr and Aristophanes authored a brand-new play: *The Bert*. After all, this is the only process by which drama survives through the ages. Its apparently dead body has to be revived by a great actor's live heart.¹¹⁵

The leaders of YGT sought to create a repertory company but believed stars were necessary to draw the national attention they needed to survive. Star system and repertory system came into conflict in many areas, including in the person of Bert Lahr. Lahr's years of experience as the "top banana" in vaudeville, burlesque, and Broadway created work habits at odds with the ensemble emphasis of a repertory system. William Cross provides an example from rehearsals.

[Lahr] couldn't stand to have anything moving while he was speaking . . . no movement, *nothing!* I mean no adjusting, no dressing If he saw you [dressing the stage] he'd give you the most withering look imaginable . . . [The costumes for the chorus] had these big headdresses with these feathers and he couldn't stand it because the wind blew the feathers and was causing movement that was distracting from his speeches.¹¹⁶

Conflict in rehearsals also came from Alexis Solomos' lack of experience with American Equity actors. Once, during *Oresteia* rehearsals, Solomos stopped a large group rehearsal to work with several actors on a part of the scene that was not working well.

So everybody just kind of sat out and lit up cigarettes or talked very quietly while sitting around [When Solomos] finally got it worked out, he said, 'O.K., let's get back to work.'

The [union] steward said, 'It's time for their break.'

Solomos said, 'They haven't been working. They haven't been working, just sitting.'

¹¹⁵ Alexis Solomos, letter to the editor, *Time*, 5 January 1968.

¹¹⁶ Cross interview. (Dressing the stage is a phrase referring to movement by an actor intended to balance stage composition.)

[The steward replied], 'Some of them have been working. You've kept three people here busy.

'Yes, but'

'I'm sorry, sir. Some of them have been working. It's time for their break.

Solomos just lost it. He got *extremely* upset and he stomped off and left rehearsals I don't think he felt he was in control of the cast I just think he seemed embattled. There was such pressure too. I think there was a lot about American actors . . . that he just didn't understand.¹¹⁷

There is no doubt that the time pressure on Alexis Solomos was intense. The start of rehearsals had been delayed by lack of funds and everything had to be accomplished with the utmost speed. Despite the pressure, not everyone came to the conclusion that Solomos was embattled. *Ypsilanti Press* reporter, Eileen Harrison was much impressed by the director as she prepared a feature article on YGT rehearsals. Describing a session with *The Birds* in the Ypsilanti Armory, she wrote,

During rehearsal the director seems intense in his concentration. He follows the script, makes swift notes, and throws up a quick arm to interrupt for instructions, and these seem to come in sudden bursts, as if ideas couldn't come out fast enough.

Sometimes he moves into the group and illustrates what he wants He used a small drum for cues and often built timing and excitement with this device.

As the afternoon wore on his coat came off and the cigarettes [*sic*] were consumed faster. When he is agitated he smokes hard, blowing the smoke out and he sits with head down and forward thrust and shoulders hunched, as if his own physical intensity would bring the result he wanted.

Then suddenly he relaxes completely, throws an arm around Bert Lahr and slaps his shoulder.¹¹⁸

Harrison also attended the first complete run-through of the *Oresteia* later that evening.

And again the hunched concentration at the director's table, the blue smoke building up . . . but . . . the mood changed. He started moving softly about, relaxed. There was a quiet conference with Judith Anderson at the far side of the room.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ "A Day With Solomos."

He became almost a shadow as even he, who knew how it was to be, felt the first impact of the powerful drama with the majestic musical theme.

There were no interruptions. Once in a while he moved in quietly to touch a hand or change a position and finally he just sat, out of this world, on a folding chair against a far wall.¹¹⁹

Dame Judith had high praise for Solomos as a director, calling her work with him “the most magnificent theatrical experience of my lifetime.”¹²⁰ It seemed to some observers though, that Alexis Solomos was quite deferential to his star actors, particularly Anderson.¹²¹ According to William Cross, Solomos was “very obliging to Dame Judith and Donald Davis. Very – almost ‘Would that be all right?’ And she’d say, ‘Of course.’ You know, she was quite willing to allow herself to be directed. He tended to accede to her a lot (Figure 19).”¹²²

Cross found both Anderson and Lahr to be pleasant to work with and friendly. Despite a tendency to make rather grand public speeches, Dame Judith was relaxed and casual during rehearsals. The sixty-eight-year-old actress was even known to stand on her head upon occasion.¹²³ Said one young member of the cast about Dame Judith, “‘She still looks like she eats two children every morning for breakfast . . . but she’s the most amusing and gracious woman I’ve ever worked with (Figure 20).’”¹²⁴

Anderson also worked very hard outside of rehearsals to promote YGT. She made several appearances on behalf of the theatre in addition to her stint on the *Tonight*

¹¹⁹ Ibid (ellipses in original).

¹²⁰ “‘This Is Total Theatre For the 1st Time,’” *Ypsilanti Press*, 15 June 1966.

¹²¹ Bird interview; Cross interview.

¹²² Cross interview.

¹²³ Gousseff interview.

¹²⁴ Marion Simon, “Aeschylus Stages a Big Comeback On a Michigan Baseball Diamond,” review of the *Oresteia* and *The Birds* as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *National Observer*, 4 July 1966.



Figure 19 – Alexis Solomos and Dame Judith Anderson



Figure 20 – Dame Judith Anderson in Rehearsal

Show. One of these included a speech to the Detroit Press Club the same day that the *Oresteia* was set to move on stage. Jay Carr, the *Detroit News* drama critic, noted that Dame Judith was charming but seemed to be trying to conserve her energy for the long rehearsal that awaited her.¹²⁵ Rehearsals and promotional appearances added up to an exhausting pace for the actress.

While Solomos and his company were adapting themselves to the theatre space and preparing for the rapidly approaching preview performances, the YGT board continued to struggle with budgetary concerns and opposition from Clara Owens. Richard Kirschner and James Gousseff presented the operating budget for the 1966 season to the board at its June 8 meeting. The weekly expenses totaled \$38,071.75. In the discussion that followed the motion to approve the budget as recommended by the production committee, “Mr. Kirschner said the staff listed in the budget, was necessary to operate the first class production the board had requested and to the best of his knowledge every area has been covered by this budget.” Owens was at this meeting, but no specific objections to the budget are attributed to her. The motion to accept the budget carried.¹²⁶ The projected deficit for the season increased from \$150,000 to \$400,000.¹²⁷ An itemized list of the weekly operating costs of the 1966 season is found in Table 2.¹²⁸

A number of other significant items were on the agenda of the June 8 board meeting. Judy Riecker gave the board a report on the preparations for the preview and

¹²⁵ Jay Carr, “Ypsi Pins Hopes on Her,” *Detroit News*, 1 June 1966.

¹²⁶ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 8 June 1966, Farres papers.

¹²⁷ “Curtains Part.”

¹²⁸ “YGT Weekly Operating Costs, June 14 – September 4,” Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Abbreviations have been expanded where decipherable.

Table 2 – 1966 Weekly Operating Budget

Cast	\$11,725
Chorus	3,125
Stage Managers	915
Technical assistants (5 @ \$85)	425
Supers (10 @ \$40)	400
Union stage crew (6)	1,625
Stage hands (6 @ \$144)	864
Conductor	350
Musicians and assistant conductor	2,500
Musician's contractor	100
Artistic director	1000
Executive director	385
General manager	364
2 assistants	300
Box office treasurer	325
10 assistants	850
Press representative, New York	250
Press representative, Ypsilanti	225
7 assistants	330
Wardrobe supervisor	200
Dressers (10 @ \$65)	650
Star's dressers	250
Seamstress	80
Auditor, local	175
Auditor, New York	100
Administrative secretary	140
Development secretary	127
SP bookkeeper	29
BD treasurer	150
Administrative assistant	85
Stenographer	85
Assistant bookkeeper	60
Chauffeur	90
Accommodations (2 @ \$105)	210
Switchboard operator (2 @ \$250)	500
House staff, directors (11)	176
Ticket takers (3)	50
Ushers (13)	150
Custodian	100
3 assistants	150

Table 2 (cont'd).

Watchmen (3)	378
Traffic control	100
Royalties	175
Advertising	2,500
Rentals – electric	450
Sound	150
Musical instruments	85
Flying rig	175
Payroll taxes	2,200
Telephone and telegraph	400
Insurance	650
Transportation	100
Electrical power	500
Legal fees	125
Pension funds	200
Miscellaneous, maintenance & supply	200
Rent on Ann Arbor box office	31.25
Rent on Ypsilanti box office	37.50
Total	\$38,071.75

press openings. The preview opening of the *Oresteia* on June 14 was to be dedicated to Eastern Michigan University. Blocks of choice seats were made available to university faculty, staff, and their families before they were made available to the general public. There were plans for a University of Michigan night as well.

For the press openings, most of the out-of-town press representatives were to be housed at an Ann Arbor hotel. On June 28, for the *Oresteia* opening, the Greek Theatre provided them with a champagne reception, buffet dinner and bus transportation to the theatre. Another reception at Ypsilanti's Huron Motor Inn was scheduled for after the performance. On June 29 the Women's Committee hosted a picnic lunch in Riverside Park. The local Kiwanis club prepared the barbecued chicken. At four in the afternoon, the press was treated to a cocktail hour and another buffet dinner, at a private Ann Arbor

home, before they were sent off to the opening night of *The Birds*.¹²⁹

After Riecker completed her report, Clara Owens made a motion that she be commended for her work as chair of the development committee. This motion is rather surprising given Owens' past and present animosity towards the board. However, Owens then "went on to tell about the contact she had made with a Detroit lawyer who has a New York client interested in doing a show, on closed circuit TV, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre will receive remuneration for this."¹³⁰ Nothing ever came of this contact, but it does illustrate that Owens was still acting unilaterally on behalf of the Greek Theatre.

At the June 8 meeting, James Gousseff persuaded the board to endorse a proposed Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program through Eastern Michigan University that would use internships with the YGT as the capstone experience for the degree. Gousseff had been working on developing this program for months. The proposal for a forty-eight credit MFA in Dramatic Arts had been approved at the Communication and Theatre Arts Department level. Gousseff combined this proposal with a foundation grant request asking for financial support in four separate areas and submitted both to Bruce K. Nelson, Vice President for Instruction at EMU. In January 1966, Nelson forwarded the proposal to EMU President Harold Sponberg.

A complete description of the MFA program can be found in Appendix B. The most pertinent part of the program to YGT was the stipulation that

A maximum of twelve (12) hours of graduate credit – no more than eight (8) in any given semester – may be allowed for work on a creative internship program conducted in conjunction with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. (Graduate credit for internship work will be granted to degree candidates only.)¹³¹

¹²⁹ YGT minutes, 8 June 1966.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ "A Request Submitted to the _____ Foundation by Eastern Michigan University

The four areas in which grants were to be solicited included \$35,000 for a developmental study which would last three years. The first year would be used to initiate the program; the next two years would review and refine the program in its initial stages. The second grant request of “\$132,000 per year for the life of the program” was for fellowships to attract top-quality students. The next request was for half-a-million dollars to endow a chair of classical theatre. Finally, the grant proposal outlined the need for an addition to EMU's Quirk Dramatic Arts Building, to increase scene shop and storage space in order to support the new program. One-hundred-thousand dollars was required for this project.¹³²

When Bruce Nelson recommended the proposal to President Sponberg in January 1966, Nelson found the grant proposal “to be a most appropriate and meritorious one.”

However, Nelson warned that

Since this proposal is so intimately linked with the Greek Theatre, it is evident that the proposal itself will be directly affected by the fortunes of the Greek Theatre. In some quarters there appears to be doubt that the Theatre will be in operation this summer, and if that should prove the case, it could be presumed that the foundations would look critically upon a program that would have little likelihood of materializing as projected.¹³³

In fact, Nelson's reservations were prescient and the MFA program never materialized.

A letter from Alexis Solomos was also on the agenda of the June 8 board meeting. In it, Solomos requested that he be allowed to leave on August 1, a month earlier than was stated in his contract. He cited the need to be in Athens for preparatory work for the upcoming season of his *Proskenion* theatre company. He also pointed out that, “My

Soliciting Grants in Support of Projects Related to the Master of Fine Arts Program in Dramatic Arts,” James Gousseff, personal papers.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Nelson to Sponberg, 14 January 1966, James Gousseff, personal papers.

presence here, after all, will not be indispensable, once the performances have taken their regular course.”¹³⁴ The board unanimously approved this request and included “an expression of praise” in its letter of acceptance.¹³⁵

Discussion turned to the possibility of asking Solomos to return the following year. Richard Kirschner “urged that everything possible be done to acquire Mr. Solomos’ services.” Clara Owens reminded the board that Solomos’ contract stated that YGT had an option for a second year and “we must decide before he leaves.” However, “it was decided to wait until a more appropriate time to discuss this with Mr. Solomos.”¹³⁶

Alexis Solomos’ letter to the board contains some interesting remarks about the progress of the festival.

As the shortage of time and strenuous [*sic*] work have not given me the chance, so far, to report to you at regular intervals, I take this opportunity to tell you that I have been astonished by the miraculous zeal, skill and spirit of cooperation that every person connected with the administration and production of the Ypsilanti Theatre has shown. Our Festival has been more than lucky to include in its artistic ensemble such personalities as Dame Judith and Mr. Lahr as well as the talents of many younger and still unknown American actors. I can also say now, after having witnessed very closely all the problems aroused by this hurried preparatory work, that the 1966 Festival would have never become a reality without the amazing expertise of Richard Kirschner and all of you who joined hands with him in this job.

These final weeks will be decisive in the artistic result of our enterprise. I would like to declare officially, if I may, that every-thing [*sic*] has conformed to my wish and – that notwithstanding three or four unhappy choices in our cast, due to casting time limitations – I am thoroughly satisfied with what you have offered me for the production and stand solely responsible for the result.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Alexis Solomos to Board of Directors, 7 June 1966, Farres papers.

¹³⁵ YGT minutes, 8 June 1966.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Solomos to Board, 7 June 1966.

Just whom Solomos was referring to as the “three of four unhappy choices in our cast” is an intriguing question. When this question was put to interviewees, a variety of responses was garnered. Solomos found one actor so unacceptable for the role in which he was cast that the actor was told he could not participate. YGT was still liable for the contracted salary but they paid the actor simply to go away.¹³⁸

Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart, chair of the development committee, believes that Bert Lahr could be among this number, but given Solomos praise of Lahr in this letter and his memorial tribute to the actor published in *Time*, that seems unlikely. Another possibility raised by Rumelhart and others is Ruth Volner, who played the nurse in the *Oresteia*. Rumelhart has a rather amusing story to tell regarding Volner.

How she got in the cast no one even hardly knows. She was such a troublemaker . . . [It] was during the napalm time, and she organized the cast to picket Dow chemical! (*Laughing.*) Eight people from the cast were going to go up to Midland, [Michigan] . . . Actually, I didn’t have anything to do with it. I was so shocked. Zeke said (*whispering*), ‘I think you’re making a big mistake. You’re collecting a paycheck from them. I can understand if you want out of the show, but picketing might not be a good idea!’¹³⁹

Volner stayed with the show and there were no groups of picketers at the Dow Chemical Company from the YGT.

Chorus member William Cross believes one glaring possibility of an unhappy casting choice was Richard Mangoode, who played the Herald in the *Oresteia*. The Herald, like many messenger roles in Greek plays, essentially enters for one long speech and is never seen again. According to Cross, Mangoode had talent but did not take direction well. Then, when cuts had to be made to bring the *Oresteia* under three hours,

¹³⁸ Gousseff interview.

¹³⁹ Rumelhart interview.

the bulk of Mangoode's scene was cut. Eventually, Alexis Solomos was able to coax the kind of performance he wanted out of the actor, but when it came time for the performance, Mangoode was incredibly erratic, never playing the scene the same way twice.¹⁴⁰

Cross also remembers an actor with a small speaking role in *The Birds*, who had "such a disagreement with Alexis, that [he] kicked him out [of the role] and said, 'Just become a member of the chorus.'" The actor, however, wanted nothing to do with *The Birds* and only showed up for *Oresteia* rehearsals. "He was not a good worker. He did not have a theatre discipline . . . [or] a good work ethic and he hated being there."¹⁴¹

The last six items in the minutes for the June 8 board meeting were all initiated by Clara Owens. They were generated by a series of letters Owens had sent to John Mayhew on May 27, June 2, and June 3. In the first of these, Owens wrote

On Monday, May 23, at a small gathering at the YGT office, to which you had bid me come, I asked you, casually, yet in the presence of several guests, if I might have a copy of the list of original donors.

You said yes and I so reported to one of the employees, asking that, when there was time, a copy be made and mailed to me.

I called the office today . . . and asked about the copy.

I was told by a member of the staff, that as soon as I had left, the decision was changed and the list was not to be mailed to me by order of Mr. Mayhew.

Is this correct?

Is there any reason why I am treated differently from other directors and all privileges are denied to me? . . .

Why are you harrassing [*sic*] me, Mr. Mayhew?

It is all very quiet and it doesn't happen to other Directors, does it, Mr. Mayhew?

Would you care to explain why a Director, who helps pay the salaries and the rent and the production costs, is denied copies of the Corporation files?¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Cross interview.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Clara Owens to John Mayhew, 27 May 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Owens' follow-up letter, dated exactly one week later was much calmer in tone. She made "a formal request for the list of the members of the corporation, and told Mayhew, "I shall expect a reply from you within five days."¹⁴³ The next day, she wrote to both Mayhew and the board with a list of questions that she expected to be answered at the June 8 board meeting. Key among these questions were requests for a cost breakdown for "the restoration of the Old Library," the cost of the stadium conversion, and YGT's current cash-on-hand.¹⁴⁴

Before these questions were addressed at the meeting, however, Owens brought up the matter of the donor list. "Mr. Mayhew explained at the time he received her request, he also received a copy of the letter Mrs. Owens had [already] sent to the donors and in his opinion, did not feel the lists would be used in such a way that would benefit the Theatre."¹⁴⁵

Turning to Owens' list of questions, the board provided her with a detailed breakdown of the costs of refurbishing the Ladies Library. The final total was unknown at this point because some bills had not yet been submitted. Owens was told the total cost of the stadium had 'not been established as yet.'¹⁴⁶ Financial statements released in October 1966 show that the total cost of the stadium conversion was just barely over \$90,000.¹⁴⁷

As to the cash-on-hand, Owens was informed that an exact amount would be

¹⁴³ Clara Owens to John Mayhew, 2 June 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁴⁴ Clara Owens to John Mayhew and Members of the Board of Directors, YGT, 3 June 1966, Farres papers.

¹⁴⁵ YGT minutes, 8 June 1966.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc., Financial Statements: September 1, 1965 to September 30, 1966," Farres papers.

difficult to determine. However,

Mr. Kirschner pointed out that money from the box office is being set aside, the total amount, to date, is \$23,382.20. Mr. Hein asked how much money had been spent to date. Mr. Kirschner gave the following figures: April 26 through May 31, \$156,210.60, June 1 through 7, \$87,890.43; he pointed out that \$51,792.00 is in bonds and are returnable to us. During the period of March 22 - April 25, \$100,902.70 was spent. Mr. Kirschner stated that we are within our budget approved by the board. He further stated it was very difficult to explain each and every cost. Any board member wishing to meet with him or with Mr. Kusell our General Manager, are [*sic*] welcome to come to the office to discuss it.¹⁴⁸

Those last two statements indicate a certain amount of frustration with Owens' constant questioning of expenditures.

Another letter written by Owens in early June deserves to be mentioned. On 4 June 1966, Owens wrote to Peter Zeisler, a founder and current director of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This letter was quoted earlier in Chapter Three, but what follows is a larger selection from it in order to put it into context:

Dear Peter: I need help. We have a budget that is completely out of line

Will you send me your budget for last year or for this? I also need an explanation, brief, as to the time it covers, number of performances, anything else you think pertinent. I must demonstrate to the Board that ours is way out of line.

The Directors are having a field day . . . two have been employed at large salaries and another is contracting for the summer facility, which was expected to cost \$60,000.00. He let no bids and showed no specifications. I missed some meetings and there is to pay.

We are going to have a tremendous summer Judith Anderson and Bert Lahr, plus the genius of Alexis Solomos will give us terrific performances.¹⁴⁹

The juxtaposition of the first three paragraphs of this letter with the fourth demonstrates Clara Owens' inability to perceive that her public criticisms of YGT might

¹⁴⁸ YGT minutes, 8 June 1966.

¹⁴⁹ Owens to Zeisler, 4 June 1966 (ellipses in original).

have a negative impact on the Festival. Sending word to the director of the Guthrie Theatre that YGT was in a frenzy of fiscal irresponsibility could hardly be conducive to a positive public image. Yet, in the same breath, figuratively at least, she asserts that they will have a “tremendous summer.”

Zeisler eventually did supply Owens with some budgetary information for the Guthrie Theatre’s 1964 and 1965 seasons. Among the Owens papers in the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, there is a copy of the figures Zeisler sent Owens, but no cover letter regarding the number of productions which they represent. Someone must have found the figures worth comparing to YGT’s budget, however, because along with the Zeisler document is a handwritten chart comparing YGT’s budget figures with the Guthrie Theatre’s. Whoever produced this chart had a tendency to “round down” the Guthrie figures to the point where the actual grand total was approximately \$100,000 more than the rounded grand total. Even using this creative math, the chart indicates that, while YGT’s salaries were \$30,600 higher than the Guthrie’s were in 1964, they were \$125,000 lower than the Guthrie’s in 1965. Furthermore, YGT’s expenses for materials in such categories as scenery, costumes, and props, averaged \$56,500 less than the Guthrie’s for the two years in question.¹⁵⁰ It is by no means clear whether this chart represents a valid comparison between two theatre companies, but it is clear that the Guthrie information failed to give Owens the ammunition she desired to attack Richard Kirschner’s and the YGT board’s fiscal decisions.

The YGT board would not meet again until after the press openings. In the

¹⁵⁰ “Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis,” Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; “Production Expenses,” Owens papers, Bentley Historical

meanwhile, slow ticket sales generated some concern. As of June 14, YGT had only \$56,128 in advance ticket sales.¹⁵¹ The *Ypsilanti Press* published two editorials on successive Mondays urging the local community to buy tickets and to spread the word to friends and family about the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Throughout the 1966 season in-state ticket sales lagged behind national sales. The Detroit-area attendance was surprisingly low.¹⁵² Ticket sales for the two weeks of preview performances were particularly discouraging. The first preview performance of the *Oresteia* played to an only sixty-five percent capacity house.¹⁵³

The local press attended the preview openings, of course, and they provided some early feature articles and reviews. The *Oresteia* opened first on June 14. Virginia McIntosh of the *Ypsilanti Press* described a mixed audience of Greek scholars and theatre neophytes, men in tuxedos and men in jeans, women in penny loafers, and women in their furs on a warm June night. What seemed to impress playgoers the most was the work of the choruses. "These choruses were the moving force for the trilogy and the pageantry, their unified action had a catch-your-breath effect on the audience."¹⁵⁴

Eileen Harrison, the *Ypsilanti Press* drama critic gave the production a rave review. Not a single negative comment was included; the national press would be more discerning. Every production element was mentioned, and highlighted for particular praise were the music and the choreography.¹⁵⁵

Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁵¹ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 30 June 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁵² Gousseff interview.

¹⁵³ Gene Schroeder, "Greek Dramas Planned," *Lynchburg (Virginia) News*, 26 June 1966.

¹⁵⁴ Virginia McIntosh, "All Kinds Attend 1st Staging," *Ypsilanti Press*, 15 June 1966.

¹⁵⁵ Eileen M. Harrison, "Oresteia Opening 'Vital, Dramatic,'" review of *Oresteia* as

Iannis Xenakis, an award-winning leader in the field of avant-garde music, composed the music for the *Oresteia*. His approach to composition was based on probability theory, creating a form of music he termed stochastic. He used an IBM computer as an aid in composition, a highly unusual tool for a composer in 1966. Xenakis insisted that Konstantin Simonovic, founder and director of a prestigious Paris chamber orchestra dedicated to the performance of contemporary music, conduct the score for the *Oresteia*. The orchestra consisted of ten wind instruments, a cellist, and two percussionists. In addition to these musicians, the choruses played various percussive instruments.¹⁵⁶

The result was atonal and non-melodic. It was described as an “ultramodern music – of dissonances, taps, and noises.”¹⁵⁷ Harrison told her readers, “The music was more than music. It was sorrow made of soul sounds, incantation made of weeping notes, it was a thin, high wail, dying on the wind. And it was thunder, and rattling and beating . . . or it was a requiem solemn and stately.”¹⁵⁸

The choreography was by Helen McGehee, a disciple of Martha Graham. Modern dance performed to modern music was interpolated into Alexis Solomos’ traditional staging of the *Oresteia* (Figure 21). Together they created what Stanley Kauffmann, the influential drama critic of the *New York Times*, called, “the illusion of tradition. We know virtually nothing of the music and movement of the original productions; we ask to be convinced through inner consistency and aptness.” In this

produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Ypsilanti Press*, 15 June 1966.

¹⁵⁶ Steve Cain, “Composer’s Dream of Synthesis to Be Fulfilled by ‘The Oresteia,’” *Ypsilanti Press*, 28 May 1966.

¹⁵⁷ Stanley Kauffmann, “Theater: Olympus Smiles on Michigan,” review of *Oresteia* as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *New York Times*, 30 June 1966.

¹⁵⁸ “Oresteia Opening ‘Vital, Dramatic.’”



Figure 21 – The Furies as Choreographed by Helen McGehee

regard, Kauffmann believed that YGT's production of the *Oresteia* "succeeded unforgettably."¹⁵⁹

Not everyone was convinced the music and dance would work. James Gousseff, the YGT board member with the most theatre experience, remembers thinking, "Oh, this is really silly. We're going to bring Helen McGehee in here and do 'Martha Graham Goes Greek.' I didn't think that would work at all and I didn't think the music would work at all. But it did. The dance was absolutely marvelous."¹⁶⁰

Eldon Elder's set for the *Oresteia* was simple and massive. The *orquestra*, *proskenium*, and *parodoi* have already been described. Across the back of the eighty-foot wide *proskenium*, Elder placed an immense slate-colored wall pierced by three giant portals, each with its own nineteen-foot simulated bronze door (Figure 22). The design was very reminiscent of what some scholars believe the front of a Hellenistic *skene* may have looked like. A high platform was fixed above and behind this wall and it was on this level that the Watchman took the stage for the opening moments of the play.

Gilbert V. Hemsley, then a young, up-and-coming designer, designed the lighting for both productions. His credits included technical direction at Princeton University's McCarter Theatre, and lighting for the Association of Producing Artists, *The Maurice Chevalier Show*, and *Barefoot in the Park*.¹⁶¹ Over five tons of lighting equipment, fed by nearly twenty miles of cable, lit the expansive stage that stretched 120 feet from *parados* to *parados*. Five separate control boards were used to manipulate the lighting effects.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ "Olympus Smiles on Michigan."

¹⁶⁰ Gousseff interview.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² "Capsule History."

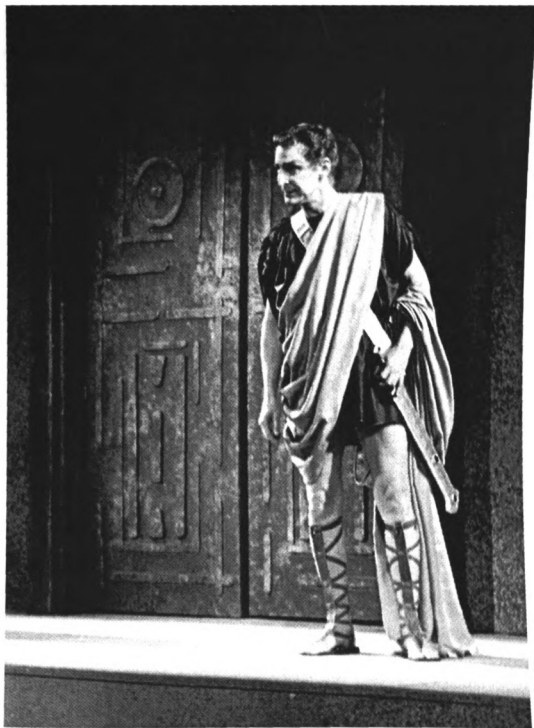


Figure 22 – Frederic Warriner as Aegisthus in Front of Central Portal

Costumes for the *Oresteia* were designed by Alexis Solomos and executed by Koula Angelopoulous. The diminutive woman of Greek and Japanese descent boasted credits from the Athens and Epidauros Festivals in Greece, the *Theatre des Nations* in Paris, Covent Garden in London, the *Teatro de la Scala* in Milano, and the Dallas Opera.¹⁶³

Angelopoulous worked to exacting standards. She was an expert draper and very particular about the weave of the fabrics with which she worked.¹⁶⁴ Material for Dame Judith's costumes was imported from Greece. Angelopoulous explained that the work of building the costumes was extremely labor-intensive because, "I place as little emphasis as possible on machine sewing . . . a policy not often followed by many theatres We are doing it as it is done in Greece." Over 150 costumes were required for the *Oresteia* and the little shop in cramped quarters behind an Ypsilanti attorney's office turned out an average of just one costume per day. Angelopoulous had a crew of twelve women with an additional dozen or so from the Women's Committee on call for times when extra help was needed. Several crew members were from Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, and other neighboring towns.¹⁶⁵

Angelopoulous' technique for building costumes was more expensive than standard theatre practices and that raises an issue concerning YGT's production methods. In the effort to produce a high quality product, there were few attempts at economy. Was it necessary to import a wardrobe supervisor from Greece, a composer and conductor

¹⁶³ "Press Information."

¹⁶⁴ Elwell interview.

¹⁶⁵ Steve Cain, "Costuming for 'Oresteia' Needed Someone With a Special Touch," *Ypsilanti Press*, 21 May 1966; Press Release, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 26 May 1966. YGT collection, Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

from Paris, and a scene designer straight from Broadway? Most theatre festivals are not so ambitious in their first year. Their desire for high-quality production values is tempered by fiscal constraints. An *Ypsilanti Press* reporter broached the issue this way.

Why was [Angelopoulos] brought over from Europe? 'Because there's nobody in America who would know how to cut the costumes so they'd hang in just the right way,' one theatre official observed. [However], by the same token, there are few, if any, persons in the country who would have been able to say a costume didn't hang right if the theatre had chosen an American costuming firm.¹⁶⁶

The opening preview performance for *The Birds* was on a Sunday evening, five days after the *Oresteia* opened. Eldon Elder designed both the set and the costumes for this production. The massive *skene* wall of the *Oresteia* was replaced by a central opening in the shape of a stylized rock formation (Figure 23). The opening to this cave-like portal gave the impression of the silhouette of a bird. Fabric panels, painted to resemble a loosely woven structure of branches, masked the backstage area to either side of the central entrance. The same effect of woven branches was created above and behind the upper level but was open in this instance, allowing the audience to see the treetops and sky behind the theatre. Two-dimensional profile pieces of rocks and tree branches enhanced the stage picture. The vertical steel posts necessary to support the three massive doors for the *Oresteia* were not removable and so, they too, were incorporated into *The Birds* design. Figure 23 shows two sets of these posts. One pair flanks either side of the cave entrance; the other set is stage left. The third pair, not visible in the figure, is symmetrically placed stage right. The only other scenery in addition to this new back wall, were twenty-two cubes, eighteen inches high, spaced evenly around two-thirds of the perimeter of the *orquestra*.

¹⁶⁶ "Theatre Called Lavish, Expensive," *Ypsilanti Press*, 3 September 1966.



Figure 23 – *The Birds* Set

Elder's costumes were colorful and feather-full (Figure 24 and 25). Unlike the *Oresteia* costumes, these were built in New York by a theatrical costume house.¹⁶⁷ Chorus members wore masks and headdresses. William Cross does not remember his costume with fondness.

We all had this *awful, awful* – long underwear is what they were – thermal underwear. We had the hottest damn summer on record and we put these on over our sweaty bodies . . . [and] we would step out on that stage and . . . the air would go; it would just escape from you. It would be *so hot*.¹⁶⁸

The music for *The Birds* turned out to be quite a problem. Solomos had originally arranged that Greek composer, Manos Hadjidakis would take music based on *The Birds*, which he had already composed, and transpose it for the YGT production. When the time came to use the music, Hadjidakis could not be found. YGT officials were “looking all over Europe for him, but it turned out he was in Japan and had forgotten all about his promise to transpose the music.”¹⁶⁹ A new composer had to be found quickly and Herman Chessid was hired; dance selections were entrusted to John Carisi.¹⁷⁰ However, according to Zeke Jabbour, Chessid's hastily completed score was so bad that it was rejected.

Dame Judith heard the music and said, ‘That's awful. Don't use it.’ Was it Dame Judith? I think it was. Maybe it was Bert Lahr. Solomos wasn't all for the music either. I don't think he was happy with it and so they cut the music. We didn't have any music except for some drum rolls and some occasional bursts of something . . . but *The Birds* needs music – lots of it.¹⁷¹

The task of composing the “occasional bursts of something” fell to musical

¹⁶⁷ “Costuming Needed Someone With a Special Touch.”

¹⁶⁸ Cross interview.

¹⁶⁹ Jabbour interview.

¹⁷⁰ YGT minutes, 23 May 1966.

¹⁷¹ Jabbour interview.



Figure 24 – Bert Lahr as Pisthetarios Facing a Bird



Figure 25 – Frederic Warriner as Poseidon

director, Konstantin Simonovic.¹⁷² It is easy to imagine the difficulty this confusion over the score created for the choreographer, Gemmze de Lappe. Some critics noticed the lack as well. Stanley Kauffmann wrote, “Music – a great deal of music – would help, but in Ypsilanti there is almost none.”¹⁷³

Nevertheless, Eileen Harrison had nothing but praise for *The Birds*’ music after viewing the preview performance. She did note, however, that “*The Birds* suffers by comparison with the complete beauty of the *Oresteia* Also it has not advanced to the same degree of professional perfection and there were noticeable hesitations.” Chief among these hesitations was what Harrison tactfully referred to as Bert Lahr’s “impromptu adaptations.”¹⁷⁴

Like many older actors, Lahr was finding it increasingly difficult to remember lines. To help him, small “cheat sheets,” with key lines printed on them, were taped to the upstage side of some of the boxes surrounding the *orkestra*. William Cross remembers one performance when the situation became so bad that Lahr felt obliged to apologize to the audience, “the small assemblage of people out there sweltering in the one-hundred-and-ten degree heat.”¹⁷⁵ In another instance, Lahr turned his difficulty into a joke. After Lahr had stumbled over several lines, the chorus of birds admonished another character to “‘Let him speak!’” Quipped Lahr, “‘I will, if I can remember it.’”¹⁷⁶

Acoustics were another problem noted by Harrison and before the press openings

¹⁷² “Simonovic: Only Man Xenakis Trusted With ‘Oresteia’ Score,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 6 August 1966.

¹⁷³ Stanley Kauffmann, “Ypsilanti Tries ‘The Birds,’” review of *The Birds* as produced by Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *New York Times*, 1 July 1966.

¹⁷⁴ “Comedy Strong, Rough, Racy.”

¹⁷⁵ Cross interview.

¹⁷⁶ Virginia McIntosh, “Audience Visits New Paradise,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 1 July 1966.

YGT would order and install an additional amplifier and a mixer to help balance the sound.¹⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the extra equipment did not completely solve the problem.

Critics and audience members for both productions complained about an inability to hear in the vast stadium-theatre. Apparently, there was at least one dead spot somewhere near second base. Poor acoustics were not always the source of the problem either.

Ypsilanti's proximity to Willow Run airport, at the time Detroit's major airport, meant that YGT's performances were often below the flight paths of jumbo jets. These and other incongruously twentieth-century sounds filtered into the open-air stadium. Bert Lahr even joked on stage about the unwelcome guests overhead, by shaking a fist at offending airplanes and calling them spies.

One final glitch in the preview opening was with Ruby Dee's entrance as the goddess Iris. She was flown over the center of the upstage wall. Figure 25 shows a backstage view, as Dee is about to crest the top of the scenery. Figure 26 depicts a successful landing. That evening, "unexpected suspense came with the use of the flying machine for Miss Dee when it momentarily appeared as if she might make her descent with her back to the audience. But she extricated herself nicely so that her arrival was a bit of a triumph."¹⁷⁸

Two weeks of previews passed quickly while cast and crew strove to refine each production. Tuesday, June 28 dawned a cloudy day as the Ypsilanti Greek theatre prepared to host eighty-six critics from newspapers and magazines all over the country. They represented such nationally influential publications as the *New York Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, the *Saturday Review*, *Harpers*, and the

¹⁷⁷ "Theatre Cleans Up 'Birds,'" *Ypsilanti Press*, 27 June 1966.

¹⁷⁸ "Comedy Strong, Rough, Racy."



Figure 26 – Backstage View of Ruby Dee Ascending



Figure 27 – Ruby Dee Landing on Stage

National Observer. Major newspapers from the largest cities in North America sent their drama critics, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, and Toronto.¹⁷⁹

The Associated Press and United Press International wire services both assigned a man to cover the event. The only notable American critic who failed to attend was Walter Kerr, whose *New York Herald Tribune* was not publishing due to a strike.¹⁸⁰

Dignitaries filled the box seats as well. “Both houses of the United States Congress were represented, as well as the State legislature. The Greek diplomatic Corps arrived in force.” Governor George Romney sent his wife. The President and the Executive Vice President of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts were there. The Presidents of Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan brought contingents from their institutions with them. The Mott family and the Dow family came to see what their money had wrought.¹⁸¹ Clara Owens also came to see what she could see.

Heavy showers in the afternoon threatened disaster for the opening of the *Oresteia* but, by curtain time, “the clouds were exhausted, and rays of sunlight made a brief appearance across the western sky.” The audience rose as the orchestra played the Greek national anthem, followed by the “Star Spangled Banner.” “After the anthems there were a few moments of quiet and the sky against the backdrop went pink. A bird fluttered overhead and the watchman . . . stood silhouetted against the dusk.”¹⁸² The *Oresteia* had begun. YGT placed its future in the pens of the pundits.

¹⁷⁹ The Toronto-based reviewer was Nathan Cohen. Reviews would also be published in London and Athens, giving YGT international exposure.

¹⁸⁰ “Capsule History.”

¹⁸¹ “An Olympian Ordeal.”

¹⁸² “Curtains Part.”

For the most part, the pens were kind. Stanley Kauffmann's review, by far the most influential, glowed but did not rave. He called Alexis Solomos "the hero of last night's opening" and Iannis Xenakis "his prime collaborator" in the creation of a production "in a high arch of tragic style." He found the Richard Lattimore translation "direct and flexible but sometimes mundane." Dame Judith was magnificent "in stature and voice, gesture and movement." However, Kauffmann regretted that, "She gives us all the grandeur of the role, though not always all the passion. Yet her performance is possible only to a large talent used by a large spirit."

Most of the other principals received praise, especially Donald Davis as Agamemnon (Figure 28) and Apollo and Frederic Warriner as Aegisthus (Figure 29). However, John Michael King as Orestes (Figure 30) was "not quite fluent in movement and his agonies are sometimes more vocal than real." Ruby Dee's (Figure 31) "voice is not quite adequate to the almost inhuman demands [of Cassandra], but her physical intensity – sustained in the middle of that enormous stage – is extraordinary." Kauffmann found that, although Jacqueline Brookes looked striking as Athene, "she uses only a few of the higher notes of her voice."

Kauffmann's highest praise came for the two choruses.

These choruses move, chant, speak singly, together, and in counterpoint, with astonishing beauty and power. Every single one of these ladies and gentlemen is giving a good performance. It is the texture of their work, as much as anything else, that establishes this festival as a serious and promising enterprise.¹⁸³

The *New York Times* reviewer also found it necessary to mention "some small defects in audibility. Despite microphones hung above the covered stage, some of the

¹⁸³ "Olympus Smiles on Michigan."

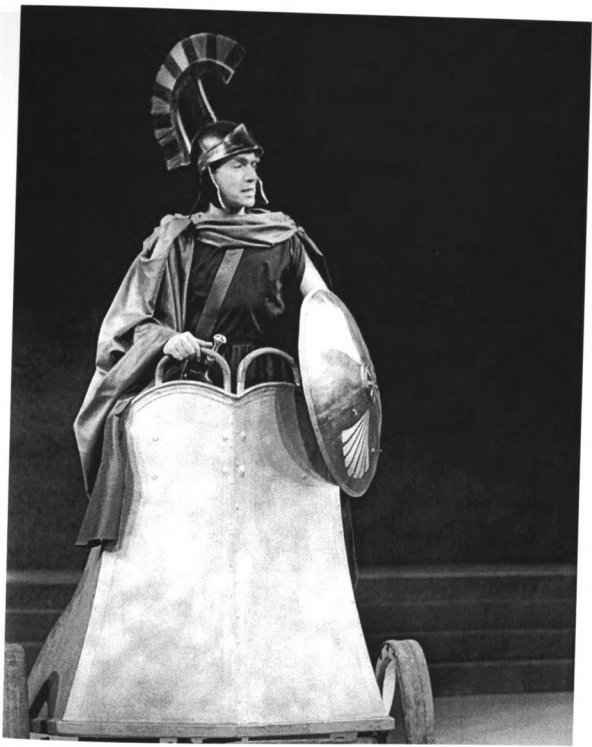


Figure 28 – Donald Davis as Agamemnon



Figure 29 -- Frederic Warriner as Aegisthus and Donald Davis as Agamemnon

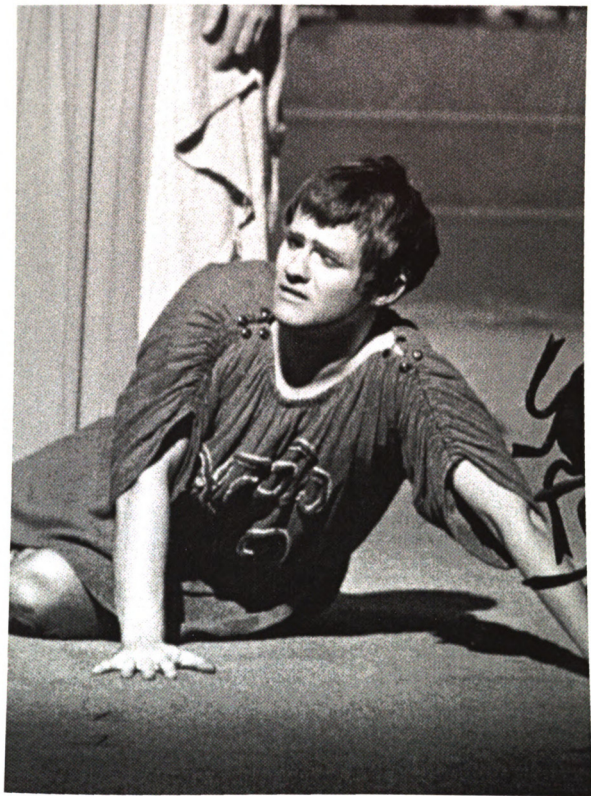


Figure 30 – John Michael King as Orestes



Figure 31 – Ruby Dee as Cassandra

lines spoken far upstage and on the parapet are hard to understand.”¹⁸⁴

William Glover of the Associated Press was less impressed. His review led with this sentence, “An earnest but overmatched team of actors last night launched into a bold theatre venture with a scratchy version of a classic Greek tragedy.” He found Dame Judith to be the “standout ace of the production.” (Many writers found it difficult to resist baseball puns when writing about the productions staged on Briggs Field.) However, the talent surrounding her was of an “erratic and uneven caliber.” Particularly panned were Ruby Dee for “frenetic stridency” and Jacqueline Brookes for “an utterly unconvincing representation of Athene.”¹⁸⁵

The Detroit papers split on their assessment of the production. Louis Cook, of the *Detroit Free Press*, called it “superb theater.” Xenakis’ music, Dame Judith, Donald Davis, and the Furies came in for special praise. Jay Carr, of the *Detroit News*, however, had little positive to say about his evening in Ypsilanti.¹⁸⁶

Critics for the major news magazines, with more time and space to evaluate the productions, tended to give YGT mixed reviews. Henry Hewes, of the *Saturday Review*, bemoaned a lack of unity and an inefficient sound system but had high praise for McGehee’s choreography. Anderson, Dee, and King were the victims of negative evaluations, while Donald Davis and Karen Ludwig received praise. *Life* magazine’s Tom Prideaux loved Alexis Solomos’ staging, but decried the “mush-mouthed diction” of the cast. Marion Simon of the *National Observer* raised the most pertinent question facing the fledgling theatre company: would “classical Greek theater thrive in the United

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ William Glover, “Overmatched Actors Launch Bold Venture,” review of the *Oresteia* as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 June 1966.

¹⁸⁶ Louis Cook, “Ypsilanti’s Greek Theater, Opening With Success,” review of the

States?” The answer, she concluded, depended entirely on how well this first season fared. The reviewer for *Newsweek* grumbled about the seats and the heat of the stadium, but credited Solomos with a profound feeling for the work. Davis and King were praised again, while “Miss Anderson and her words seemed swallowed by the immense playing area and the faulty acoustics . . . Ruby Dee was a nasty Cassandra, screeching her prophecies when she wasn’t chewing the scenery. But through it all, the magnitude of Aeschylus triumphed.”¹⁸⁷

Another item included in the *Newsweek* review, one that must not have pleased local residents, was a negative assessment of the community itself.

Ypsilanti, Mich., 36 miles west of Detroit, is the home of Eastern Michigan University, several minor automotive factories, one movie theater, a highway strip full of gas stations, motels and hotdog stands, a faceless main street, 27,000 people, and memories of the days when the town was a terminus of the underground slave railway. ‘It reminds me of one of those drab depressing midland industrial towns in England,’ says one Detroit resident. ‘As soon as you’re in it you want out of it.’

Practically the only thing impressive about Ypsilanti is its name . . . and even that is usually diminished to Ypsi. But last week, the name was spelled in full in newspapers from Boston to Los Angeles. Ypsilanti, Mich., was suddenly on the map, as the home of America’s first classic Greek repertory theater.¹⁸⁸

A bit of irony can be mined from a comparison of this review with the *Ypsilanti Press*’ editorial of June 29 which began “Welcome Critics – And While You’re Here, Look Around!” The article is essentially a guide to a walking and driving tour of the

Oresteia as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Detroit Free Press*, 30 June 1966.

¹⁸⁷ Henry Hewes, “The Ypsi Regeneration,” review of the *Oresteia* and *The Birds* as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Saturday Review*, 16 July 1966; Tom Prideaux, “Two Great Greeks in a Ball Park,” review of the *Oresteia* and *The Birds* as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Life*, 16 July 1966; “Aeschylus Stages a Big Comeback;” “Pisthetairos in Ypsi,” review of the *Oresteia* and *The Birds* as produced by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Newsweek*, 11 July 1966.

¹⁸⁸ “Pisthetairos in Ypsilanti.”

community, highlighting areas of interest and possible development. Critics were told, “This is a town of great potential – much of it still undeveloped, but with a citizenry on the move Ypsilanti is a town going places, and the Greek Theatre that is drawing you here is a prime example of civic spirit and willingness to achieve.”¹⁸⁹

Some of that civic spirit was clearly in evidence the afternoon of June 29 as the community, lead by the YGT women’s committee, hosted the press and visiting dignitaries to a picnic lunch in Riverside Park. Clearly, it was not the kind of reception the big-city critics were used to, but it was a pleasant experience with one minor exception. The Greek Consul General, John E. Tsaoussis, lingered over his lunch, when his fellow diners from across the picnic table all decided to disembark at the same time. The over-balanced table listed heavily to starboard, sending the General overboard in a shower of comestibles. Teddy Farres remembers that the General took his dousing in good humor as people scrambled to pull the offending table off him. Her teenage son was dispatched to chauffeur the condiment-laden General to his quarters for a change of uniform.¹⁹⁰

This bit of unplanned slapstick was an apt prologue to the opening of *The Birds* that evening. As with the *Oresteia*, critical response was varied but mostly positive. Stanley Kauffmann thought the play not worth doing, though he had praise for Lahr’s performance. He identified a “listlessness about the production,” which he attributed to a lack of effort and invention on the part of Alexis Solomos. Conversely, William Glover of the Associated Press, after having panned the *Oresteia*, which Kauffmann loved,

¹⁸⁹ James Brown, Jr., editorial, “Welcome, Critics – And While You’re Here Look Around!” *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 June 1966.

¹⁹⁰ Farres interview.

praised *The Birds*, which Kauffmann hated. He called it “a romp; very much worth seeing,’ which ‘pops about like a rainbow rocket.”¹⁹¹

There was some general agreement by the critics over certain production elements. Bert Lahr’s unique talents as a buffoon and clown were universally praised; Ruby Dee’s small role was frequently mentioned as a showstopper and Donald Davis attracted positive notice as Hoopoe. On the negative side of the ledger, Gemmze de Lappe’s choreography was often criticized, as was the music (or the lack of it) in the production. Elliot Norton of the *Boston Record American* stated his objection most succinctly, “Through some failure of choreography and music, the potentially exciting dancing chorus of birds are not only clumsy but ridiculous.”¹⁹² A number of critics found that the updating of gags and the emphasis on low humor blunted the satire that they expected to find in a production of Aristophanes.

Several critics agreed with Bert Lahr that the Arrowsmith translation was awkward at times, though not everyone was pleased with his solution of inserting “Lahrisms” whenever possible. Martin Gottfried found that the production became not really a play, but rather “a two-hour routine, with everybody playing straight man [to Lahr] . . . it is a good show and it is bad . . . Aristophanes.”¹⁹³ Bert Lahr’s son, John, writing his review after the run of the production, had an answer for the Aristophanic purists.

[T]he critics were not faced with the turgid, plodding translation by William Arrowsmith and the kind of eighteenth-century vulgarity which Lahr refused to say on stage. By making it more contemporary, the play

¹⁹¹ Kauffmann, “Ypsilanti Tries ‘The Birds;’” William Glover, “It’s a Romp; Very Much Worth Seeing,” review of *The Birds* as produced by Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 June 1966.

¹⁹² Elliott Norton, “Lahr Hilarious, Rest Pretty Dreary,” review of *The Birds* as produced by Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Boston Record American*, 30 June 1966.

¹⁹³ Martin Gottfried, “‘The Birds,’” review of *The Birds* as produced by Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Women’s Wear Daily*, 1 July 1966.

does lose some of its political focus. However, Lahr's improvisations do not eliminate it, and more important, he sustains the festival spirit of the play and makes it live. This is more authentic than the literal classical references.¹⁹⁴

John Lahr also made more than one stab at the rest of the company in defense of his father.

The production has received little help from the 'authentic' Greek director imported for the season. Alexis Solomos, better acquainted with the tragedies, has eliminated much of the feyness of the play by not exploiting the dance or more subtle music. He reduces the musical effects to the clarion call of a burlesque trumpet rather than exploit a wider variety of sounds. His inability to handle the comedy is seen not only in the necessity of Lahr's grab-bag of old jokes, but in the unintelligent pacing of the show.

He ends the first act after Lahr and his fellow traveler have been decked with wings thereby missing a key chance to build the comedy and keep the momentum of the play moving in the second act.

A few seasoned professionals (Donald Davis, Jack Fletcher, and Ruby Dee) compensate for the general mediocrity of the amateur cast recruited mainly from the nearby University of Michigan campus.¹⁹⁵

John Lahr overstates the case in two instances here. First, Alexis Solomos was a published and acknowledged Aristophanes scholar.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, YGT's contract with Actor's Equity limited the number of non-union members to six among the principals, so the cast could hardly be accurately described as amateur. Furthermore, only seven students from the University of Michigan were a part of the cast and they were all chorus members.¹⁹⁷

In the midst of the excitement over the press opening, Clara Owens had hired Ann Arbor lawyer, Clan Crawford, Jr. She hoped to force a meeting of the corporate body, as

¹⁹⁴ John Lahr, review of *The Birds* as produced by Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, *Manhattan East*, 8 September 1966.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ "YGT Fact Sheet – Alexis Solomos," Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁹⁷ "24 Ann Arbor Residents Help With Greek Theatre," *Ann Arbor News*, 8 August

requested in the petition delivered to the board in May 1966. On June 29, the day of *The Birds*' opening, Crawford sent a list of questions to YGT board president, John Mayhew. The YGT board had tentatively scheduled the meeting for July 15 and Crawford wished the group to use the intervening time to prepare answers to seven detailed questions relating to YGT's expenditures of funds. He assured Mayhew that "Mrs. Owens and I have no intention of taking any action harmful to the interests of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre."¹⁹⁸

In the meanwhile, the YGT board had other, more pressing, problems to solve. When they met on June 30, the season was officially less than three days old and yet the organization had already faced several payroll crises. Delight over the positive reviews was tempered by the dire financial situation. YGT's debts were currently at \$62,000 with additional bills expected to increase the total to \$170,000. Attendance of sixty-five percent of capacity, or better, was required to offset the weekly operating costs. Sales for the preview and press opening performances averaged closer to forty percent of capacity. "Private parties and loans" had solved the shortfall so far, but it was by no means clear how the organization would even make the payroll that was due the next day. Additionally, though the previous payrolls had been met, payment of the withholding taxes was two weeks behind.¹⁹⁹

Payroll withholding taxes were supposed to be placed in escrow each week and then forwarded to the government on a quarterly basis. The taxes were not due until July 31 and the intention was to replace the unpaid portion before the deadline. Sadly, that

1966.

¹⁹⁸ Crawford to Mayhew, 29 June 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁹⁹ YGT minutes, 30 June 1966.

intention was never realized and the failure to pay withholding taxes would have very serious repercussions for theatre organizers as they tried to mount a 1967 season.

Some steps were being taken by YGT in an attempt to ameliorate the financial situation. The prop shop was eliminated, the costume workshop was cut back to just the dressers, a secretary was laid off, and the box office staff was reduced from eleven to eight. These changes reduced the weekly operating costs by \$2,000, but it was still not enough to compensate for the disappointing ticket sales.²⁰⁰

Kirschner, Riecker, Mayhew, and Jabbour had traveled to New York the week before to approach foundations and individuals for support of YGT. There was some hope from that quarter, but it was slim. By the June 30 board meeting, John Mayhew had already received word from the Rockefeller Foundation that they would not be providing YGT with any funds.²⁰¹

Mayhew had approached his boss, Henry Ford II, for a personal loan of \$50,000. The auto magnate agreed and Mayhew recalls cashing the check immediately and driving the twenty-five miles from Ford World Headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan straight to the theatre to meet a payroll deadline.²⁰² Another \$42,000 loan was made anonymously to YGT and the *Ypsilanti Press* contributed \$1,000 during those early weeks of the season.²⁰³

Board member William Hein, “asked if this state of emergency would exist each week.” Richard Kirschner replied that there was “hope that ticket sales would pick up.” Kirschner also told the board that he “had appointments tomorrow with the possibility of

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Mayhew interview.

²⁰³ YGT minutes, 30 June 1966.

solving our immediate problem.”²⁰⁴ These appointments seem to have met with some success, because the payroll was met that week, as it was each week of the season.

However, box office sales never reached a level where organizers could be sure of having enough money to make the payroll (see Table 3) and the scramble for loans and donations continued throughout the season.²⁰⁵

Table 3 – YGT Box Office Summary

Week	<i>Oresteia</i>		<i>The Birds</i>		Total Sales	Total Amount
	No. of Sales	Amount	No. of Sales	Amount		
6/14 – 6/19	2,291	\$7,710.35	641	\$2,501.75	2,932	\$10,212.10
6/20 – 6/26	1,123	4,326.83	1,749	5,905.81	2,872	10,232.64
6/27 – 7/3	1,561	8,527.04	759	3,846.18	2320	12,373.22
7/4 – 7/10	2,162	9,378.26	1,280	5,004.24	3,442	14,382.50
7/11 – 7/17	1,735	7,393.10	1,624	6,459.83	3,359	13,852.93
7/18 – 7/24	2,099	9,020.52	1,718	6,550.18	3,817	15,570.70
7/25 – 7/31	2,340	8,973.87	1,953	7,441.40	4,293	16,415.27
8/1 – 8/7	2,024	8,783.20	1,880	6,794.32	3,904	15,575.52
8/8 – 8/14	2,779	11,543.02	2,632	10,227.34	5,411	21,761.36
8/15 – 8/21	2,763	11,855.83	2,083	7,043.19	4,846	18,899.02
8/22 – 8/28	2,922	11,889.15	2,854	11,224.88	5,776	23,114.03
8/29 – 9/4	3,508	13,367.64	3,040	10,876.65	6,548	24,244.29
Total	27,307	\$112,768.81	22,213	\$83,875.77	49,520	\$196,633.58

As chairman of the development committee, Judy Riecker did much of the solicitation for these emergency funds. She recalls that her efforts were made all the more difficult by Clara Owens’ public campaign against the fiscal policies of the YGT board and their executive director, Richard Kirschner. At one point, Riecker approached Eugene Power, an influential, wealthy, Ann Arbor citizen and a regent for the University

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ “On Olympian Ordeal.”

of Michigan. Power asked her,

‘Why are you people stealing all this money? Why are you wasting money?’

I asked him, ‘What are you talking about?’

He said, ‘Well I’ve been sent letters [by Clara Owens] on a weekly basis’

I didn’t know what to do. I mean, how do you combat that kind of thing? Well, then I found out from an old friend . . . that Clara was having meetings every week at her house trying to figure out ways to stop the theatre My friend had been invited to these meetings and he said, ‘Judy, I don’t think there is anything you can do about it.’²⁰⁶

According to Riecker, a member of the 1966 Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival also received a negative letter from Owens regarding YGT. The two companies had an exchange program whereby members could view each other’s productions for no charge. A group from Stratford took advantage of a day off by visiting the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre and Judy Riecker and Zeke Jabbour spent some time socializing with them. One of the visiting stage managers warned them,

‘You guys are in a lot of trouble,’ and he told us about receiving this letter saying that Zeke and I were stealing money from the theatre along with Dick [Kirschner].

And we said, ‘What!’

I was a neophyte at what I was doing, but I was at my desk every day at eight o’clock. I worked every night until midnight. I was so tired and I’d called up every relative I had in the world, trying to get money from them. *Nobody* stole *anything* from the theatre. It was sort of frightening.²⁰⁷

On July 9, John Mayhew sent a letter to YGT’s corporate membership, notifying them of a meeting on July 19. Its purpose was “to discuss the financial status of the Theatre pursuant to the petition that was filed, and the request for information from [Owens’ lawyer], Mr. Clan Crawford, Jr.”²⁰⁸ Clara Owens sent her own letter to the

²⁰⁶ Rumelhart interview.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mayhew to Member, 9 July 1966, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

membership encouraging them to attend. She enclosed a copy of the seven questions developed by Crawford and told the membership,

Because I protested the waste of our funds and the failure to observe the budgetary plan established for the season, I was suspended . . . as Chairman of the Board, and have been subjected to rudeness and indignities

This season has been an artistic success, thanks to Alexis Solomos. I hope it will continue to be. But the many financial leaks cannot be glossed over as they have been without producing a catastrophe.²⁰⁹

YGT officials provided a mimeographed copy of each of the seven questions and their responses to the approximately 150 people attending the meeting.²¹⁰ Attendees learned that the theatre had paid out \$489,691.38 between 1 September 1965 and 30 June 1966. Receipts to the theatre from various sources totaled \$507,737.33. The total indebtedness of the corporation was \$406,146.73. This amount included nearly \$23,000 in federal payroll taxes due July 31.²¹¹ (For a complete reproduction of the answered questionnaire, see Appendix C.)

YGT officials also fielded questions from the floor. According to the *Ypsilanti Press*,

It was frankly acknowledged that attempts to raise money for the permanent theatre had been interrupted by the intense efforts expended in getting the show ready for production and that there is a financial problem reflected in the unpaid bills.

Richard Kirschner . . . said that it is his intention to pay all bills as immediately as possible. He explained that for the past five weeks all efforts had been bent toward meeting the payroll and keeping running so that there will be time for Mrs. Judy T. Riecker and her committee to raise funds.

²⁰⁹ Owens to Members of the Corporate Body of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 12 July 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

²¹⁰ "Praise Turns Challenge to Rally for Greek Theatre," *Ypsilanti Press*, 20 June 1966; "Greek Theatre Expenses Total \$489,691 So Far," *Ann Arbor News*, 20 July 1966.

²¹¹ Questionnaire response, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

‘She’s been extremely successful in keeping the theatre alive,’ he said.²¹²

As the evening drew to a close, Circuit Judge James R. Breakey, a highly influential Ypsilanti citizen who lived across the street from the YGT offices, rose and addressed the crowd.

‘I have lived across the street for 50 years. Few others here have lived here longer. I concede that this theatre is the most significant single event in our long history of cultural development.’

He suggested that all present ‘don’t consider anything but how to raise money and make this a future success. Hindsight is better than foresight,’ he said. ‘Now is the time for all of us to do our best as have the board, Mr. Solomos and all who have worked with him. They have made it an outstanding international cultural success for this city.’²¹³

YGT production committee chair, James Gousseff remembers that the crowd stood and cheered after this speech by Judge Breakey and the *Ypsilanti Press* confirms that there was “vigorous applause.”²¹⁴

The next day, the *Press* reported that Ypsilanti merchants had agreed to help promote YGT ticket sales. Coupons redeemable for four tickets at a discount rate were available in area stores. Store clerks were encouraged to push sales through a daily contest. The clerk who sold the highest number of theatre tickets over a minimum of twelve would be given a free ticket. YGT board members, Thor Marsh and Moray Kutzen, had called their fellow business owners to a meeting. They told the men about a box office survey, which indicated that local ticket sales accounted for less than twenty percent of the total. Twenty merchants agreed to the promotion.²¹⁵

Despite this positive development, Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart recalls that Thor

²¹² “Praise Turns Challenge to Rally.”

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Gousseff interview; “Praise Turns Challenge to Rally.”

²¹⁵ Eileen M. Harrison, “Ypsilanti Merchants Go All-out to Sell Theatre Tickets,”

Marsh and some of the other YGT board members were not completely consistent in their support towards the end of the 1966 season. The Brakeley Feasibility Study had warned that board members' lack of focus on the artistic possibilities of the Greek Theatre could become a problem for the organization. Now, as YGT's artistic success failed to translate into financial success, the board members who believed in the Greek theatre only as a business proposition and not as an artistic dream withdrew their support. According to Rumelhart, several board members, including Thor Marsh, abandoned YGT financially as well, failing to pay off substantial pledges.

It's not that they were bad people. It was that they were convinced that it wasn't going to work anyway, so who the hell cared? . . . Thor, who was my great champion, . . . said to me, 'O.K. now Judy, on the week of July 12,' or some such week, 'I want you to make me responsible for [the payroll].

I called on Monday [of that week] and they said, 'Oh, he's not going to be back for two weeks.'²¹⁶

On the morning of July 30, the YGT board held their regular meeting. Before it began, Clara Owens requested a session with the executive committee. She presented the committee with the following statement typed on her personal stationary.

30 July 1966: Yesterday afternoon about 4:30, I went to the Theater Office at the request of Mrs. Wright [a YGT secretary] to pick up some material for Mr. Solomos. Mrs. Wright and Mr. Kusell and another man were in the basement office. Mrs. Wright told me the material had been left with the telephone operator upstairs. I turned to leave, Mr. Kusell came over to me, we spoke, he then gave me a couple pats on the cheek and then slapped me hard. He then said, 'Put your hands behind you.' I went upstairs got the material and left.²¹⁷

There is no record of how the executive committee dealt with this accusation. However, development committee chair, Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart remembers hearing

Ypsilanti Press, 20 June 1966.

²¹⁶ Rumelhart interview.

²¹⁷ Owens, 30 July 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of

Buddy Kusell's side of the story. She explained it this way,

[Clara would] get so angry that she'd *physically* go after people. She was just a sweet woman [but] she would push people One night, Clara got really angry with Buddy and he put his arm around her and said, 'Clara, please don't be angry.'

And she had him arrested for trying to strong arm her, or trying to beat her up, or something. And poor Buddy – I mean this was a fifty-eight year old man – and she swore out a warrant for his arrest

[The police] came to the theatre the next day and said, 'We know there seems to be a problem here, but could you explain your side of the story too?'

And poor Buddy said, 'Oh my gosh, she was crying and I put my arm around her.'²¹⁸

After fifteen minutes dealing with this issue, the executive committee returned for the regular business meeting. The first item on the agenda was a final report from Alexis Solomos, who was to begin his journey home to Greece the next day. However, Solomos, though notified of the meeting, had not yet arrived. Mayhew telephoned Solomos and personally asked him to attend.²¹⁹

While the board waited for Solomos to arrive, they turned to other business items. One item of note was an offer of assistance from Keeve (Kip) Siegel, who had founded the immensely successful Conduccion Corporation. Siegel had written a letter to a group of area industrial leaders, including several important figures from the Detroit area. He suggested they meet on August 8 to discuss ways to help the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. The YGT board voted to endorse this program and created a position for Siegel as Chairman of the Industrial Committee.²²⁰

Richard Kirschner also had some good news for the YGT board. State arts

Michigan.

²¹⁸ Rumelhart interview.

²¹⁹ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 30 July 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

²²⁰ Ibid.

councils had been created as a part of the National Endowment for the Arts act. One of the first actions of the Michigan Council on the Arts was to pay for the creation of some radio and television commercials for YGT. Karl Haas, the leader of the newly created council, had been instrumental in initiating this action.²²¹

Board member Marvin Felheim brought up the fact that the board had yet to congratulate Alexis Solomos officially on the productions. Clara Owens “stated that the board has been amiss in not making any gesture to assure Mr. Solomos we are going to negotiate a contract for next year.” James Gousseff, never fond of the high salary paid to Solomos, “asked if it was the pleasure of the board to express [an] intention to take up the option of Mr. Solomos’ contract for next season.” In the discussion that followed, it is likely that some mention was made of YGT’s unreliable financial situation and the limitations it placed on board’s ability to make a firm offer to Solomos. It was decided that “a statement of appreciation and the possibility of renewing Mr. Solomos’ contract for next year’ should be drafted in the form of a resolution by the board.”²²²

Solomos arrived, made a brief statement reviewing his work with the theatre, and promised to send a written report to the board later.

Mr. Mayhew noted that while there may have been certain shortcomings, the time pressures that were involved forced us to place an emphasis on survival. The productions did make a tremendous impact; an institution is not built overnight – it might take two or three seasons before large numbers of people will recognize this as a national event.

When asked how he felt about doing the Festival again next year, Mr. Solomos said it was so far away and asked for the hopes of the board.

Mr. Jabbour said we hoped to continue the festival on a year ‘round [sic] basis. Mr. Solomos said he didn’t believe we could exist without the help of large contributions. Rain should not stop a performance Mr. Solomos stated. Necessary arrangements should be made to take care of this. There is no need for a higher budget but we should be able to

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

achieve better results. Dame Judith Anderson has a marvelous spirit of teamwork he said, and should be asked to come back again next year.

Mr. Mayhew noted that we have very high hopes for an association with Mr. Solomos again, perhaps it is a case of seeing how our plans mature and Mr. Solomos said he would like very much to collaborate next year, provided he could arrange his affairs.²²³

The board's statement of appreciation was read. Marvin Felheim thanked Solomos for his "remarkable understanding of the situation" and told him he had "accomplished something that no other foreign director has done." Good-byes were exchanged and Alexis Solomos left the meeting.²²⁴

The next day, the *Ypsilanti Press* published a letter from Alexis Solomos addressed to the people of Ypsilanti and the members of YGT. He thanked the YGT board and the numerous volunteers who had helped the theatre. He praised the cast and the technical crew. He singled out Mae Wright, a YGT secretary, for special praise. Solomos explained why he had stayed in Ypsilanti, despite the lack of preparedness when he arrived. "A feeling of concern and solidarity for all those people persuaded me to set about a task, which under normal circumstances, would have demanded a longer rehearsal period, a classically trained cast and an adequately equipped theatre." Solomos believed the venture to be a success. "In spite of our financial difficulties, our hurried procedure and our partial insufficiency, all the technical problems but two – the acoustics and *The Birds*' music – were surmounted." He did note, however, that

. . . it was very natural that some mistakes of policy or method – having frequent repercussions on rehearsals and performances – couldn't have been avoided in this first year. Mistakes, however, can be used creatively, provided that the shortcomings of the past become constructive experience for the future. And I wholeheartedly wish that there will be a theatrical future in Ypsilanti, glorious and Dionysiac.²²⁵

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ "Solomos' Farewell Lauds Efforts of Town, Cast," *Ypsilanti Press*, 1 August 1966.

Of Clara Owens, Solomos wrote,

. . . to me, she symbolizes not only the Ypsilanti Festival project, but, in more general terms, what man, as a spiritual being, should always aspire to. I am happy to mark that her long-cherished dream has finally begun to materialize: Ypsilanti's name has been pronounced in the United States in connection with man's highest ideal: his rise over the trivial routine of earthly existence into the world of poetic imagination.²²⁶

The YGT was two-thirds of the way through its twelve-week season as August began. Throughout the season, the box office numbers had been climbing steadily, if slowly, except during weeks when bad weather cancelled a performance (see Table 3). It was noted that a substantial amount of support came from Lansing, Toledo, Chicago, and New York City. Additionally, for some puzzling reason, sales to Wisconsin residents were unusually high. Detroit ticket sales were disappointingly low, but the Canadian city of Windsor just across the Detroit River, supplied a large number of patrons.²²⁷

In an effort to combat the low Detroit attendance figures, a bus service was instituted between Detroit and Ypsilanti for theatre patrons in early August. On Friday and Saturday nights, for nine dollars, patrons received round-trip transportation, a buffet dinner at the Huron Motor Inn and tickets for the evening's production. This special offer did encourage some Detroit-area residents to attend. The weekend of August 18, a *Detroit Free Press* reporter was among forty-two passengers on the chartered bus.²²⁸ Financial statements indicate, however, that the "bus tour and theatre plan" was not a great success. Revenue was only \$360, while expenses totaled \$395, resulting in a net loss of \$35.²²⁹

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Louis Cook, "Theater Fights for Its Life," *Detroit Free Press*, 7 August 1966.

²²⁸ Jean Sharley, "Theater Crowd Takes a Chariot Ride to Greece," *Detroit Free Press*, 23 August 1966.

²²⁹ "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc., Financial Statements: September 1, 1965 to

By August, the productions were playing to audiences that averaged only forty percent of capacity. An average of sixty-five percent capacity over the course of the entire season was required to meet the operating costs of the theatre. On August 3, John Mayhew told a reporter, "we would have to sell out during most of August to make 65 percent [as an average for the entire season] Word of mouth, our advance sales and other indicators lead us to believe that this is within the realm of possibility."²³⁰ Encouraging indicators notwithstanding, August did not bring YGT sellout houses and the average capacity never reached sixty-five percent.

On August 7, the *Detroit Free Press* published an article by their drama critic, Louis Cook, which would have significant consequences for YGT. The article, "Theater Fights for Its Life," was a generally positive one; it praised both of the productions and the city of Ypsilanti. However, it also warned that YGT "might fail for lack of support."

The new Ypsilanti Greek Theater [*sic*] has had five payroll crises and has survived only by dramatic brinkmanship.

If help does not arrive quickly, the financial confrontation at 5 p.m. next Friday may be its last

Despite all the kind words [of the critics], the theater is in serious trouble. Its patronage is growing steadily, but slowly.

It costs \$34,000 a week to operate the theater. It is earning, at present, about \$16,000 a week

A group of southeastern Michigan industrialists will meet soon to consider what they can do to keep the theater going.

Other volunteer groups are rallying to the cause in Detroit and other Michigan cities.

But there is a great possibility that by the time these good intentions result in action there will be nothing left to act upon.²³¹

The timing of this article was very unfortunate. Kip Siegel and his group of

September 30, 1966," Farres papers.

²³⁰ "Greek Theatre Expecting August Attendance Rise," *Ypsilanti Press*, 3 August 1966.

²³¹ "Theater Fights for Its Life."

“southeastern Michigan industrialists” were set to meet the next day. According to production committee chair, James Gousseff, Siegel had

... called all his business associates, anybody who owed him a favor, and said, ‘Come to breakfast at my place and bring your checkbooks.’ He was planning on their underwriting the whole thing through their businesses. These were all prominent business persons who could do it and get away with it. Unfortunately, the day before [the meeting], in the *Detroit Free Press* ... [Louis Cook’s article said] this great national treasure is going to go down the drain. And, of course, business people don’t put money into anything that is going down the drain. No one showed, including Siegel.²³²

Kip Siegel did not abandon YGT, though. At the August 18 board meeting, development committee chair, Judy Riecker reported that “the Industrial Committee ... is no longer in existence due to adverse publicity in the *Detroit Free Press* and too much emphasis placed on the Industrial Committee.” However, she also told the board that Siegel had given the theatre “one thousand shares of Conductron stock worth \$75,000.00,” but warned the group that Siegel did not want the donation to be made public.²³³

The *Free Press* article was picked up by the wire services and a spate of articles appeared across the country predicting the early closure of the theatre. Newspapers carrying the story included the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and *Variety*. YGT officials denied the reports, citing ongoing fundraising efforts and increasing box office revenues as evidence that they could survive to the end of the season. YGT president John Mayhew told the *Ypsilanti Press* that, “once the theatre gets through the season, it will be in good position to make presentations to foundations for future support.” Certain foundation representatives had already been to the theatre to see the

²³² Gousseff interview.

²³³ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 18 August

productions for themselves. These included representatives from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Rockefeller Brother's Fund, the Ford Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.²³⁴

According to James Gousseff, this hope for future foundation support made YGT officials determined to finish the season "by hook or by crook – by crook as it turned out. It was not supposed to be that way, but that's the way it turned out."²³⁵ YGT continued to solve its payroll crises, in part, by not paying state and federal payroll taxes. At the season's close YGT's liability for these taxes exceeded \$90,000.²³⁶

Gousseff, in fact, claims that the YGT board had some kind of assurance from a particular family foundation, which he was unwilling to name, that if YGT would complete the season, the foundation would pay the unpaid taxes. Once the season was over, the foundation refused to help. "They came to a disagreement [with YGT] was about all we were told and we knew we were sort of left holding the bag."²³⁷ No other YGT board member could confirm this claim.

The need to impress various foundations was a topic of the August 18 YGT board meeting. YGT board minutes indicate that Judy Riecker urged the board to continue their fundraising efforts. Riecker stated that,

If our indebtedness is not paid, we cannot approach the foundations. Mrs. Riecker suggested that we use the income from ticket sales, in the next few weeks, to begin to pay off some of our debts. It is imperative that all of our indebtedness be paid off by the 14th of September.²³⁸

1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

²³⁴ "Theatre Denies Reports It Will Close This Week," *Ypsilanti Press*, 10 August 1966.

²³⁵ Gousseff interview.

²³⁶ "Financial Statements: September 1, 1965 to September 30, 1966."

²³⁷ Gousseff interview.

²³⁸ YGT minutes, 18 August 1966.

To this end, the board voted to insert a pledge card asking for donations in the programs handed out at the remaining performances.

Judy Riecker also suggested that YGT find some way to honor Dame Judith, Bert Lahr, and the rest of the company. She reminded the board of Dame Judith's numerous publicity appearances and told them that the actress had donated her last week's salary to the theatre. The board decided to host a party in honor of the cast, to be held in Riecker's home.²³⁹

The premature reports of its demise gave YGT's ticket sales a late-season boost. Attendance at the final evening performance of *The Birds* on September 1 was 1,260, a new record for the production, but still only sixty-six percent of capacity.²⁴⁰ Approximately 1000 people attended the final performance of the *Oresteia*, which closed the season on September 4. YGT board member, Teddy Farres, remembers being impressed that Dame Judith was moved to tears as she spoke to the audience after the show.²⁴¹ The elegant actress told the crowd, "'A great theatre was born here . . . It was a healthy theatre baby, perhaps the healthiest theatre baby I have ever seen. We should all be very grateful to those who made it possible, and it is up to you to see that this baby grows into a monumental institution.'" ²⁴² With a final bow, the stage lights faded on the departing cast, the house lights came up, and the first and final season of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre ended.

Between April and June 1996, the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre completed all the tasks

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ "'Birds' Sets New Record," *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 September 1966.

²⁴¹ Farres interview.

²⁴² "Applause Is Deafening as Theatre Season Ends," *Ypsilanti Press*, 6 September 1966.

necessary to the creation of a high quality summer festival dedicated to the performance of classical Greek plays. They engaged a strong acting company led by Dame Judith Anderson and Bert Lahr. They transformed Briggs baseball stadium into an attractive and functional theatre with remarkable speed. YGT accomplished all this despite a public campaign of opposition, led by Clara Owens, against their board and their executive director, Richard Kirschner. However, the quality and the speed of the festival came at a high price and not enough money and effort were put into audience development. Ticket sales were abysmally low, despite the critical acclaim garnered by the festival's productions of the *Oresteia* and *The Birds*. There were weekly payroll crises from the preview opening through the end of the season. Each successive crisis was met and the season was completed against tremendous odds, but YGT was burdened with enormous debt, including over \$60,000 to the federal government in unpaid withholding taxes. The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre had overcome tremendous obstacles to succeed but the costs of its success would soon become too high to sustain.

CHAPTER FIVE
YPSILANTI GREEK THEATRE, AFTER THE 1966 SEASON
“A CONSPIRACY OF CIRCUMSTANCES”

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre had managed to complete its first season, just barely. Now the goal was to mount a second season, cheaper and better than the first. To achieve that goal, YGT would struggle for the next two years against public apathy, enormous debt, and continued opposition from Clara Owens – all in vain.

In the original lease contract for the stadium, Eastern Michigan University had agreed to allow YGT use of the facility for the next year, with the possibility of yet another year. However, EMU did require the theatre to dismantle the stage so that the field could be used as a ballpark in the interim. YGT struck the stage and the set and stored as much as they could for use the following year. Wiring under the stands and other items that did not interfere with baseball play were allowed to remain.¹ The theatre staff was reduced to five people, led by Richard Kirschner.²

The highest priority for YGT became raising funds to settle its debts and preparing material to convince foundations that the theatre was worthy of support. An Associated Press article, written by Gene Schroeder just after the season closed, was picked up by a number of papers around the country. The article described YGT as a “smashing success” everywhere but the box office. At this point, YGT officials expected a season deficit of approximately \$200,000. They admitted that completing the season had been a struggle financially, but told Schroeder, ““Before we could go after foundation

¹ Steve Cain, “Future of Greek Theatre in Hands of Foundations,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 3 September 1966.

² “Debt-Ridden YGT Striving Hard to Survive,” *Ann Arbor News*, 16 September 1966.

grants . . . we had to be able to demonstrate that we could complete an entire season without folding.”³

On September 29, YGT received news that helped them make their case to the foundations and other potential donors. The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was named the winner of “Michigan’s Greatest Community Achievement of 1966.” This was a statewide contest. YGT had been one of sixteen regional finalists and was chosen for the award by a unanimous decision of the judges. Donald O. Ruffer, manager of the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce, prepared the presentation that garnered the award. Unfortunately, no grant or prize money was associated with this contest. Nevertheless, YGT officials were delighted with the announcement and hoped it would help them with their future fundraising efforts.⁴

The award also gave YGT board members some good tidings to offset the dismal financial news they had to disseminate at the third annual meeting of the corporation that evening. Three major items were on the agenda: the president’s report, an election of board members, and amendments to the by-laws of the corporation.⁵

John Mayhew’s report was cautiously optimistic. ““All that is in our power to do, is going to be done. We have the conviction that we will be able to do this.”” He told the group that the indebtedness of the theatre was approximately \$233,000. The first step in YGT’s plans for the future would be to pay off this debt and then they hoped to approach nearly seventy-five different foundations in time for their December meetings. Mayhew thanked Dame Judith, Eastern Michigan University, the Ypsilanti City Council, the

³ “Ypsilanti: May Try Again,” *Chicago Daily News*, 8 September 1966.

⁴ “Greek Theatre Wins State-Wide Contest,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 29 Thursday 1966.

⁵ Agenda, Third Annual Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc., 29 September 1966, Farres papers.

Ypsilanti Area Industrial Development Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, and the *Ypsilanti Press* for all their help in making the first season a reality.⁶

The election of a slate of nineteen members to the board brought the total number of board members to thirty-one.⁷ For the first time since the formation of YGT, Clara Owens' name was not on the ballot, though her term was expiring. Owens had not been asked to run.

In response, she wrote a letter to the YGT membership. Owens called the theatre "an artistic success, and a financial catastrophe." She did not directly ask members to conduct a write-in campaign on her behalf. However, she did list a number of disagreements she had with the current leadership. Most of them were familiar complaints including: the reorganization of the board that created the production and development committees, the dropping of the third play from the season, lack of board oversight on expenditures, the failure of the board to continue contracts with Weese and Solomos, the move to the Ladies Library, and "outrageous expense accounts." She also added a new complaint to the list, "the duplication of services in New York and Ypsilanti."⁸

She warned her readers that,

The President will be presenting you with a *new* Constitution at the annual meeting, a constitution which no one but the favored few have seen, and which will indubitably change the nature of our dream. The one evident objective of those in control is the retention at any cost of the Executive Director, Mr. Kirschner, who has contributed most toward the bankruptcy of the organization and the elimination from the scene of Mr. Weese, Mr. Solomos and myself.

I have kept silent of late since I did not want to jeopardize the

⁶ "Annual Report Given: Theatre Continues Search for Funds," *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 September 1966.

⁷ "19 Named Directors at Theatre '66 Meeting," *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 September 1966.

⁸ Owens to Friend, 27 September 1966, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

success of Mr. Solomos' productions. I have been ostracized by the local members of the Board because I stood up for the things we all believed in when this venture started; I have been treated rudely and subjected to personal indignity. My name could not be mentioned in a press release nor was my picture available. The time for silence is now ended. You are the donors and the members of the corporation who have the right, indeed who have the obligation, to ask the necessary questions about the conduct of the corporation's affairs these past six months; not only to ask but to demand that you be given the truth and not put off with evasive answers. You have the right to vote . . . I hope you will still have it after the new Constitution is set.

As my swan song, I want to thank all of you for the aid and comfort you gave us, for the dollars and the work that you contributed in the early days, for your faith in a dream. The course is almost ended for me, I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith.⁹

Owens was not elected to the new board. Her involvement with YGT in an official capacity was over. She did continue for several years, however, to work behind the scenes to recreate an Ypsilanti Greek Theatre that conformed to her image of what the organization should be.

The slate of nineteen officers was elected in its entirety. There had been a last minute change to the slate when Grace Sponberg, wife to EMU President Harold Sponberg, withdrew her name from consideration. Gus County, a Toledo, Ohio resident who was the supreme treasurer of AHEPA, replaced her. Other names of note who were new to the board included: Circuit Judge James R. Breakey, Jr.; Dame Judith Anderson; Professor Keeve Siegel of the Conductron Corporation; and Peter B. Fletcher, manager of the Credit Bureau of Ypsilanti and a close personal friend of Clara Owens. John Mayhew, Judy Riecker, James Gousseff, William Hein, and Zeke Jabbour all retained their positions as board members.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid (emphasis and ellipses in original).

¹⁰ Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc., 29 September 1966, Farres papers.

While ballots for the new board were being counted, attention was directed to several proposed amendments to the corporation by-laws. These amendments composed the “*new Constitution*” to which Clara Owens referred in her letter. In actuality, the changes were minor and did not alter the essential nature of the corporation. A new article, titled “Name and Purpose,” was inserted as the first article of the by-laws and the remaining articles were renumbered accordingly. The first section of the new article stated that, “the name of this organization shall be the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc. Section 2 provided YGT with its first official mission statement. It read,

The purpose or purposes for which the corporation is formed are as follows: The development and production of Greek theatrical and modern plays and dramas, acquiring of real estate and personal property and receipt of gifts, funds and properties necessary or incident to the development and continuation of a program of staging theatrical productions, plus any activities conducive to the development in the Ypsilanti area of a Greek cultural center.¹¹

Few other significant changes were made. The end of YGT’s fiscal year was moved from August 31 to September 30 so that the fiscal year would no longer end in the midst of the operating season. The annual meeting was rescheduled from September to November to allow sufficient time for an audit. Finally, in the event of any tie votes on issues facing the board, the president of the corporation was granted a tie-breaking vote, bringing his or her total number of votes to two.¹²

The board also fielded questions from the floor at this annual meeting. Dr. Eugene Gibson, a professor in EMU's Foreign Languages Department and a colleague and good friend of J. Henry Owens, asked a number of questions about issues that Clara Owens had raised in her letter. Gibson asked the board why an auditor’s report had not

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

been prepared, since the fiscal year had ended on August 31. He was told that the audit had been delayed to include the entire season and that there had not been enough time to prepare one since September 4.¹³

Gibson also asked whether Solomos had been given another contract. Mayhew replied that no contracts, including Alexis Solomos', would be signed until funds were obtained to honor them. Only five people were to be employed over the winter, "a press representative, a secretary and two part-time employees and [a] part-time bookkeeper."¹⁴ Gibson then inquired as to Richard Kirschner's contract status and was told that the Executive Director did not have a contract for the following year either.¹⁵

Eugene Gibson questioned the board's failure to pay withholding taxes. He was informed that a portion of that debt had been paid and the remainder still owed was part of the \$233,000 deficit previously reported. YGT's accountant, William Kenner stated that the withholding tax "was combined with other taxes and [he] was not able to give the exact amount at this time."¹⁶ Richard Kirschner promised that the figures would be available shortly. Judy Riecker "stated the non-payment of the withholding tax was a board decision in order to keep the Theatre open this season. She went on to say this was a decision the board had to make and it was the right decision, in her belief."¹⁷

In a 1998 interview, YGT board president, John Mayhew, vehemently denied that the determination not to pay withholding taxes was made by the board. He blamed

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Annual Report Given."

¹⁵ "Minutes of Third Annual Meeting."

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that a YGT balance sheet dated 30 September 1966 does give a specific amount due for withholding taxes – \$60,761.19.

¹⁷ "Minutes of Third Annual Meeting."

Richard Kirschner for what he believed was an irresponsible decision.¹⁸ Nevertheless, board minutes indicate that the YGT leadership was at least notified that the taxes were in arrears. The 30 June 1966 minutes read, in part, “It was pointed out that salaries had been met, without payroll taxes, which are two weeks behind. However, the payroll taxes are not due yet.”¹⁹ Despite Mayhew’s misgivings, when Riecker defended the decision at the annual meeting, he made no public statement opposing her.²⁰

Later in the meeting, Kirschner told the group he was leaving for New York to work with foundations there. Perhaps in response to Dr. Gibson’s persistent inquiries into financial controversies, Kirschner stressed that he would not be on salary. Kirschner added, “Less [*sic*] the membership be concerned about the expense account from February, [the account which so incensed Owens] . . . no statement has ever been submitted from the Executive Director’s office.”²¹

William Anhut, owner of the Huron Motor Inn and a newly elected board member, asked, “if a statement could be made to the effect that the theatre will go forward.”²² John Mayhew, speaking for the board, told him that they felt “very strongly that there will be a Greek Theatre here, next year, the year beyond that, and well into the future; there is no element in our plans for a back door retreat.”²³

After the annual meeting, YGT’s local press representative, Ted Rancont, Jr. sent

¹⁸ Mayhew interview.

¹⁹ YGT minutes, 30 June 1966.

²⁰ “Minutes of Third Annual Meeting.”

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.* Actually, this was not the first time Anhut was a member of the YGT board. He had been a member of the first board but was pushed out by Owens. He claims, “Clara actually did me a favor . . . [and] saved me a lot of money.” Anhut was not a member of the board during the operating season and so was not liable for the IRS penalties over the failure to pay withholding tax.

²³ *Ibid.*

his "1966 Press Department Report" to all new members of the board. Sitting board members had received the report several weeks earlier.²⁴ There are several items of interest in this report, which give insight into the internal operations of YGT.

Rancont opened by thanking the YGT board and the theatre staff "for the confidence they reposed in me for the 1966 season." The report was meant to provide information and constructive criticism in the hopes that a 1967 season would "run more smoothly."

As many of the Directors know, my personal investment in the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was an important factor in my decision to gamble a stable professional position for the chronic instability and ridiculously long hours of YGT.

Another factor, the deciding one because of family responsibilities, was the assurance of Dick Kirschner and the YGT Production Committee that they intended to offer me a two-year contract as soon as feasible

The contract has not been renewed. I was told two weeks ago by the Production Committee and Dick Kirschner that they felt themselves unable to make even the most tentative of verbal commitments for January of 1967, the last month in which promotion for the new Season can be expected to begin on anything short of a crash basis.

Any sane man at that point would have uttered a few choice curses and left. Instead I am arranging to pursue graduate studies and support my family by a variety of expedients so that I may remain at your disposal until January.

This kind of behavior, plus workweeks of seven 16-hour days, cannot be expected from anyone who does not have a vital personal interest in YGT. It should not be depended upon.

The Greek Theatre should be prepared in 1967 to offer its Press Representative, whether it be me or someone else, a long-term contract and sufficient lead time to do his job within reasonable hours.²⁵

In his report, Rancont made several suggestions for the future season. After listing a dozen different individuals and agencies who had been involved in various capacities with YGT's graphics and advertising, Rancont stated, "This was too many

²⁴ Ted Rancont, Jr. to Mrs. Theodora Farres, 28 August 1966, Farres papers.

²⁵ Ted Rancont, Jr., "1966 Press Department Report," Farres papers.

cooks. For 1967, I strongly recommend that a single local agency be engaged to handle our entire graphics and advertising program.”²⁶

Meeting deadlines was sometimes a problem for the YGT press department.

According to Rancont’s report,

Throughout the season, Dick Kirschner required that every release and its distribution be cleared personally by him before it could be sent out. This created many practical problems, and frequently resulted in releases being sent out too late, resulting in a dilution of their effectiveness and creating a morale problem in the Press department.

For 1967 I suggest that the Press Department be given sufficient autonomy in its routine operations to insure that media deadlines can be comfortably met and that opportunities are not lost because of a need to clear ordinary materials.²⁷

Mailing lists were hastily compiled from a variety of sources. The press department was warned that two of the lists that YGT was purchasing would almost entirely overlap.

It was decided by Buddy Kusell and Dick Kirschner to purchase both lists. An incomplete analysis of coded returns, plus feedback from numerous individuals, seems to indicate that the lists did largely overlap. It also appears that there was considerable overlapping among our 67 other lists. Some individuals reported receiving as many as seven brochures, and I personally received five.²⁸

On top of these added expenses, the late preparation of the 1966 season brochure increased mailing costs by more than one third and limited its distribution through other channels. Rancont recommended that the 1967 brochure be “ready for mailing in February, at the latest.”²⁹

Publicity was also hampered by YGT’s inability to afford Equity wages for a

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

photo call. Compensation equal to that for an evening's performance was required for actors called to pose for publicity photographs in full costume and make-up. Rancont's report was emphatic. "For 1967, I cannot urge too strongly that photo calls be provided, no matter what the cost – and that they be provided as early as is physically possible. The cost will be recovered hundreds of times over in improved publicity, and in greater volume of publicity."³⁰

Rancont was also worried that, if none of the local press department for the 1966 season was retained for the 1967 season, it would leave YGT "with no one able to identify and use the resources built during the first year." He urged that at least one, and preferably more, of the three members of the department be retained. In closing, he provided the board with a suggested publicity timetable for the 1967 season. The first three items on the list needed to be completed by late September or early October.³¹ By the time the new YGT board was formed, publicity was already behind schedule.

Shortly after the new board was elected, Clara Owens received a puzzling letter from William H. Nims, assistant secretary for the Ford Foundation. The first paragraph read,

This will acknowledge your letter of September sixth addressed to Mr. Lowry. For your information, the present priorities of the Foundation preclude assisting summer festival activities and, hence, no funds have been made available to the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.³²

What puzzled Owens was that she had no recollection of writing any letter to the Ford Foundation. She called Mr. Nims and he sent the letter in question to her.³³ It is indeed

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Nims to Owens, 10 October 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

³³ Nims to Owens, 19 October 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library,

signed "Clara Owens," but the signature bears little similarity to those on other documents signed by Owens.

The letter to the Ford Foundation is an attack on YGT. It lists examples of the organization's alleged extravagance.

An unknown young actor's contract bought off for \$5,000 and he replaced [*sic*] without setting a foot onstage.

Anderson paid \$3,500 a week, a chauffeured [*sic*] car and \$2,000 a month penthouse. She would have worked for a flat \$1,000 a week. She is working for a minimum at City Center in New York this season. The Cronyns [Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy], Helen Hayes, etc. work for minimums in similar projects.

Solomos paid \$35,000. A 5th rank staffer of the National Theatre he would have come from Athens for \$10,000 and thought it riches. No artistic director at any festival in North America gets such inflated fees.

Overstaffed box office, press office, crews; four times the necessary lighting equipment; extravagance of the rankest kind in every department, down to the salaries of the Chorus, has [*sic*] caused the Greek Theatre to be a great problem to other festivals and wrecked its economy. It could and should have produced the two plays for one third the nut and one half the weekly operating costs.

You are reliably reported to have given a 'loan' of \$90,000 to be squandered in this fashion. And the public apathy grows.

The area is growing indignant, and I am heartsick at these developments. The latest is to drop the title Greek, call it Ypsilanti Festival, run a musical, a current play and one classic next summer and hit you up for the subsidy to underwrite it. Thus all justification will be lost for a festival or for financing. Such a program is already successful at the University of Michigan. My whole hope had been for a distinguished Greek Drama Center.³⁴

The negative reference to Solomos in the third paragraph makes it highly unlikely that Clara Owens was the author of this letter. Writing to a friend a month later, Owens seems to have blamed YGT leadership for the letter, which she described as "saying very vicious things about YGT." She added, "it is most definitely not my signature. I do not

University of Michigan.

³⁴ Owens [?] to Lowry, 6 September 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

know whether this sort of letter went to other foundations or not.”³⁵ The whole incident is really quite strange. It is difficult to imagine who would be motivated to write such a letter and forge Clara Owens’ name. Clearly, it was not in the best interests of any of the YGT leadership for a foundation to receive this kind of letter.

The YGT board next met on 13 October 1966. A slate of officers was elected. Little changed except that William J. Conlin, an Ann Arbor attorney, replaced Thomas Kentes as treasurer. Ways of raising funds were discussed, including a suggestion for a membership fee of ten dollars per year. A committee was formed to explore this idea along with committees for solicitation, special events, the speaker’s bureau, and the formation of Detroit and Toledo YGT boards. Concerning their outstanding debts, the board “agreed that henceforth only those bills necessary to keep the theatre in existence be paid. All other monies shall go toward the payment of FICA and Withholding taxes.”³⁶

Winter was approaching and the Ladies Library had no central heating system, so Judy Riecker recommended that the small remnant of the YGT staff move to the basement of the building where portable heating units could be placed. This proposal was acted upon and the upper portion of the building was closed off to public access.³⁷

This decision and several others made at the October 13 board meeting were made, at least partially, in response to suggestions contained in the “Accounting Department Report, October 10, 1966” prepared by comptroller William Kenner.

³⁵ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

³⁶ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 13 October 1966, Farres Papers.

³⁷ YGT minutes, 13 October 1966; “Theatre Shifts Back to Stadium,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 21 October 1966.

According to the report, twenty of YGT's creditors, those with whom YGT had only small balances due, had been paid in full. However, fourteen members of the company had filed for unemployment benefits and YGT would owe the Michigan Employment Security Commission \$4,530 on October 25. In addition to this debt,

Federal taxes obligation as of September 30, 1966 totals \$85,786.89. Of this amount, \$22,977.73 was due on July 31, and the balance of \$62,809.16 will be due on October 31. It is our intention to file on that date in order to forestall any penalties accruing for non-filing regardless [sic] of whether funds are available or not for payment. The Internal Revenue Service . . . has our account under consideration. As yet no action has been forthcoming from them.³⁸

Kenner's report also made recommendations for future seasons. These suggestions provide insight into certain problems encountered during the 1966 season.

For example, Kenner recommended:

That in any budget planning the [accounting] department assist the budget planners in adapting their budget to the accounting system. There was almost chaos when the budget was prepared last June

That all accounting functions be the full responsibility of the comptroller and his staff who in turn is responsible to the executive director, the Board and its Treasurer. The dispersal of many accounting functions each working separate from the [accounting] department created a condition of confusion last season which is still difficult to straighten out. We are having difficulties arriving at correct accounts payable amounts, due to the loss of many invoices. The payroll should also be the responsibility of the [accounting] department. We are still straightening errors in [the payroll] department

That there be stronger control over the use of purchased or rented instruments used by the orchestra. The loss in damage and theft last season was inexcusable

Greater control over the use of theatre telephones for personal calls. There must be a definite policy on this. One employee ran up over \$100.00 in calls for which no compensation would have been received except for the scrutiny of the telephone bills. She has paid most of it. [However], calls were made from the stadium for which YGT cannot collect

Greater control over unauthorized personnel in the Concessions stand when the manager is not present. Considerable loss was sustained

³⁸ William Kenner, "Accounting Department Report, October 10, 1966," Farres papers.

through the disappearance of merchandise unpaid.³⁹

Turning from the accounting report to other business at hand, Judy Riecker suggested that Zeke Jabbour take over the position of acting executive director in Richard Kirschner's absence. Jabbour agreed and promised to arrange some limited office hours during part of each working day.⁴⁰ At this point, Kirschner was no longer on the YGT payroll but he was still working with the theatre group to solicit foundation money. There is nothing in available YGT records to indicate exactly when the organization's relationship with Kirschner officially ended.

Judy Riecker presented the board with a note from Kirschner "concerning possible legal action on the part of Mr. [William] Arrowsmith toward payment of fees and royalties due him by YGT for the production of *The Birds*." Board minutes indicate that YGT's "New York attorneys have already begun action to settle this peacefully." Riecker also told the board that the YGT costumes for *The Birds* had been rented to Taylor University for \$15 per costume plus shipping, insurance, and cleaning.⁴¹ This business transaction netted YGT \$300.⁴²

One of the last items discussed at this board meeting was a bit of a mystery. "Mrs. Farres and several other board members noted the receipt of an anonymous letter this past week. Of great concern was the fact that the postal stamp was from the meter in the YGT offices."⁴³ No further details about this letter are available.

The day after the meeting, the *Ypsilanti Press* reported that YGT was launching a

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ YGT minutes, 13 October 1966.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Receipts and Disbursements, October 1, 1966 to November 23, 1966," Farres papers.

⁴³ Ibid.

\$250,000 fund drive. The goal of the drive was to “meet unpaid bills from the present season and provide a small margin for interim operation.” The article described the October 13 board meeting as a “‘brainstorming’ session” and solicited readers to telephone the theatre with any suggestions they might have for raising money.⁴⁴

On October 18, Alexis Solomos wrote Clara Owens from Athens, Greece. He apologized for not writing sooner and asked her,

How are things at this moment – and how are you involved – by participation or abstention etc. Give me, please, both an objective and a subjective summary of the last events, and tell me what you feel about next season – if there is going to be one. I haven’t had any news from the Y.G.T. Everybody has forgotten me, as if I were never part of the whole affair.⁴⁵

The YGT board, in the meanwhile, was still struggling with its debts. At the October 19 board meeting, the wisdom of choosing a target date, by which time all the debts must be paid in order to determine the feasibility of a 1967 season, was discussed. One suggestion was 15 February 1967. No action was taken on this proposal.⁴⁶

Several board members recommended various letters of solicitation. These letters were targeted at different YGT constituencies, including foundations, YGT ticket purchasers, and college and university professors within a one hundred-mile radius. Board members were assigned to draft the letters and submit them for approval at the next board meeting.

Board member Moray Kutzen mentioned recent grants made by the states of New York and California to arts organizations within their borders and wondered whether the

⁴⁴ “Theatre Launches Fund Drive,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 14 October 1966.

⁴⁵ Solomos to Owens, 18 October 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 19 October 1966, Farres Papers.

state of Michigan would be willing to do the same for YGT. Judy Riecker replied that Michigan Governor George Romney had been approached and that, while he “was encouraging in his support of YGT,” he had “declined active solicitation on our behalf.”⁴⁷

The board resolved to accept a non-interest-bearing loan from Kieve Siegel for \$400 to go towards reducing the organization’s debt to Michigan Bell. The board also resolved to allow Eastern Michigan University to disburse funds held in escrow by the university directly to “firms and individuals involved in the dismanteling [*sic*] and winterizing of the Stadium-theatre and its grounds.” Zeke Jabbour reported that security was a problem at the stadium and that he had contacted both the EMU and Ypsilanti police departments about the threat of vandalism.⁴⁸

Not every board member who was asked to draft a letter had completed this task by the next board meeting on October 26. Discussion of those letters that were presented was tabled until the next board meeting. No reason is given in the board minutes for the delay.⁴⁹ However, YGT was beginning to suffer from apathy among its leadership. The following two board meetings, scheduled for November 2 and November 9, had to be cancelled due to a failure to attain a quorum.⁵⁰

Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart explained her feelings this way:

Once we got to September, [1966], there was a part of me that just died. Zeke [Jabbour] was working very hard to make it go . . . [but] I just wasn’t really that active. A part of me went on with it, but not my soul [After the 1966 season], we met a lot, but it was obvious that we weren’t going to be able to solve the problems.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 26 October 1966, Farres Papers.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 16 November 1966, Farres Papers.

⁵¹ Riecker interview.

Jabbour was working hard for YGT. He and fellow board member, William Anhut, had been assigned the task of examining the current operating costs to look for ways to reduce expenses. Their report to the rest of the board on October 26 listed \$266.45 weekly for a paid staff consisting of the comptroller, one part-time secretary, one full-time secretary, and a part-time “telephone-typist.” In addition to these expenses, YGT was responsible for an additional \$768 for items such as interest on loans, equipment rental, insurance, utilities, and contracted debt amortization with Michigan Bell.⁵² With little money coming in and debt mounting, the board asked Jabbour to look for ways to cut costs even further.⁵³

The board also examined a list of 117 local businesses owed money by the YGT. The grand total of the local accounts payable exceeded \$132,000. The largest debt in this list, by far, was the \$70,874 owed to the Jabbour Building Company; the next largest total was \$8,019 owed to a Detroit insurance company.⁵⁴ The list of local businesses was divided up among the board members. They were to call the businesses and inquire into the possibility “of a reduction of the payable amount or complete cancelation [*sic*] of the account as a donation to YGT.” It was decided that many of the smaller accounts were to be sent letters to the same effect.⁵⁵

Jabbour had also prepared a budget for the 1967 season to present to the board. However, James Gousseff asserted that this was the production committee’s prerogative. Gousseff agreed to take Jabbour’s budget into consideration, but insisted that the budget

⁵² “Off Season Weekly Operating Costs – Effective November 1, 1966,” Farres papers.

⁵³ YGT minutes, 26 October 1966.

⁵⁴ “Local Accounts Payable,” Farres papers.

⁵⁵ YGT minutes, 26 October 1966.

would come from his committee.⁵⁶

A large list of items had been prepared for the production committee's consideration in planning the 1967 season. It involved such questions as how many plays of what type should be done; who should choose the plays; and should Solomos be rehired as artistic director or would a multi-director system be less expensive and more feasible. Ideas for saving money were also entertained. It was suggested that between forty and fifty thousand dollars could be saved by using "taped non-original music." Playing in rolling repertory (one company producing a number of productions sequentially) instead of rotating repertory (one company producing a number of productions simultaneously) was considered, as was "commissioning [a] distinguished outside repertory company . . . to bring in a show previously mounted or prepared." Finally, the committee was asked to examine the possibility of opening the tragedy after the comedy. It was believed that by doing so "we can save 2 or 3 weeks of rehearsal. With the vastly increased cost of rehearsal occasioned by the new Equity contracts requiring full contract pay even during rehearsal, we may have little choice."⁵⁷

Thor Marsh, reporting for the business solicitation committee, recommended that the YGT board approach Eastern Michigan University for a closer affiliation; perhaps the university would be willing to construct a permanent building for the theatre. Marsh also suggested that the board investigate "the possibility of full community support of YGT by a general election or action of the City Council to make possible an allocation of a ¼ mil for cultural enhancement of the city." He estimated this would net YGT

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ "For Production Committee Discussion," Farres papers.

approximately ten to twelve thousand dollars.⁵⁸ Neither of these proposals was ever very actively pursued.

In early November, John Mayhew received official word, through Congressman Wes Vivian, that the NEA would not be providing support to the YGT in 1967.⁵⁹ In response to a letter of inquiry from the Congressmen, NEA Deputy Chairman Livingston Biddle wrote, "Because of our very limited budget we are unable at this time to provide funds in the magnitude which the Greek Theatre requires."⁶⁰

It would not be until November 16 that the YGT board could muster enough members at a meeting to establish a quorum. Drafts of the letters proposed over a month earlier were finally approved. Zeke Jabbour also had prepared drafts of portions of the foundation presentation for the board to review and approve.⁶¹

YGT faced a dilemma concerning foundation appeals. Accountant Harold Post, of Post, Smythe, Lutz, and Zeil, was at the board meeting to discuss the possibility of a YGT audit. He believed that YGT books were sufficiently in order to allow an audit to be completed relatively quickly. However, since the "risk of delayed payment was certain," he was not willing to agree to do the work without consulting his partners. He told the board that YGT was not required by law to complete an audit, "however, foundations generally require such an audit before considering an application for aid." A committee was appointed to investigate the possibility of soliciting a free audit from one of the six national auditing houses that operated an office in Michigan. It was hoped that

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Vivian to Mayhew, 1 November 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁰ Biddle to Vivian, 3 October 1966, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶¹ YGT minutes, 16 November 1966.

one of these firms would be willing to use the YGT audit as a tax write-off. Failing that solution, the committee was to consider “ways in which we could keep auditing expenses to a minimum.”⁶²

While the YGT board grappled with their financial dilemmas on the evening of November 16, the Women’s Committee was holding its first annual meeting less than two miles away. The committee elected Eva-Dean Elwell as its new chairwoman. Elwell replaced Mildred Harris who was now a member of the YGT board. Other new officers were elected and plans were laid for various fundraising activities.⁶³

On November 21, the lead story in the *Ypsilanti Press* was entitled, “Greek Theatre Kicks Off New Fund Raising Drive.” The purpose of the drive was to retire debts and finance the next season. Previous donors were encouraged to renew old pledges. The new membership fees were also announced: \$10 per year for a regular membership, \$50 per year for a “patron” membership, and \$100 per for a “sponsor” membership. The solicitation letters that took so long to finalize were to be mailed out that week. YGT president, John Mayhew was quoted as saying, “I think that Ypsilanti and this area has reason to be tremendously proud of this theatre and, being so close to it, may not realize the national impact it made It is a thing that very few, if any, other communities in this country can lay claim to.” Mayhew also reported that \$250,000 worth of debt had been paid but that \$200,000 was still outstanding.⁶⁴

The next day, Clara Owens wrote a letter addressed to “Dear Wes.” The addressee was almost certainly United States House Representative Wes Vivian

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “Greek Theatre Women Elect Mrs. Elwell,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 18 November 1966.

⁶⁴ “Greek Theatre Kicks Off New Fund Raising Drive,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 21 November 1966.

(Democrat), for several reasons. Vivian had always been a strong advocate for YGT.

Additionally, at one point in the letter, Owens refers to the possibility of forming a “bi-partisan” group. Finally, no other man reported to be involved with YGT had the first name of Wes.

This letter has already been referenced many times in this study because Owens included in it a summary of the history of YGT from her point of view. Her reason for writing the letter is contained in the third paragraph.

I understand Prof. Siegel is a Director [of YGT]. I have not met him. How would he fit into a new organization with a new Business Manager? Would it be worth his and your busy time to meet with me, for verification of what I am about to say and to discuss a plan for the future of YGT?⁶⁵

After Owens told Vivian her version of the history of the YGT, she wrote

As long as Mayhew, Riecker, Jabbour, Harris and ilk continue, I don't see how anyone could give money and have confidence.

I have covered three years in a very skipping fashion. Of course, I think the idea is worth continuing and developing. I have some know how. I know of three Executive Directors, who would like to come here. In each case, the man is top This program cannot be accomplished unless a good Artistic Director can have the backing of a good Executive Director.⁶⁶

With that written, Owens signed off on the letter, but then she added another page, saying,

I just can't leave this letter at this stage. It sounds mostly as if I have a big gripe this is the past. What I really have, in spite of health difficulties, is a tremendous desire to see this project prosper.

I believe that Peter Fletcher, County Republican Chairman; Bill Anhut, Huron Motor Inn; Bill Hein, Ypsi Press [*sic*]; Teddy Farres, original member; John Renton, National Bank; possibly Tom Kentes of AA [Ann Arbor] and how about Mr. Siegler [*sic*]? We might get a majority, and at a special meeting we can change the Officer lineup and plan a new season. No one has talked to Solomos, but me . . . we can do

⁶⁵ Owens to Wes [Vivian?], Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

two plays, Greek, with one chorus, we can add a third play for instance "Boys from Syracuse" or one hundred others of Greek origin we can do a season, better than last year. I will not turn a finger to raise money for the bottomless rathole we have now.

There is one man, very successful in theatre, who might be induced to come here. He is imaginative, honest and will not overspend. I understand that two deadlines have been set by State and Federal creditors, for before Xmas. If the little group decides to declare bankruptcy before then, we are in the hands of the City, and I do not believe we can ever recover. It is next year, a success or fold.

Yes, Wes, I am a fool. Because I ever did this, because I am again worrying and trying to do something to perpetuate a good, I am a fool.

Politics, envy, jealousy, hate, selfish ends, just like any other attempt to bring to life a new or potentially powerful force, I had it.

Would *you* be willing to meet with a small group, bi-partisan [*sic*], to try to save a wreck? Would you ask Mr. Siegel how he feels about the situation? Will he help?

Maybe this is like a revolution I have ammunition but don't have guns.

Henry and I are leaving [for Europe] in Feb. for six months, time is short. The present board cannot produce another season, I am far from sure that I can, now. I will try, if some of you think that it is important, as I do.⁶⁷

There is no record of how Wes Vivian responded to this letter. Kip Siegel was a friend of Zeke Jabbour's, so it is unlikely that he would have been willing to lead Owens' "revolution" even had he been approached.⁶⁸

In the meanwhile, vandals had struck the theatre site, as Jabbour had feared they would. Judy Riecker had seen the damage and it prompted her to write a letter to the editor of the *Ypsilanti Press*. She wrote that some of her pride in the theatre project and in the city had been "tarnished" by what she had seen at the theatre.

. . . [T]o my horror I found a disgusting mess. The beautiful padded blue bleacher seats had been slit down the center and the foam rubber padding either stolen or ripped to shreds and thrown on the ground. The orchestra chairs that were left in the orchestra pit had been smashed to bits and lay all over the grounds. Padlocked doors had been forced open and obscene words inscribed on the walls (not to mention a number of endearments

⁶⁷ Ibid (ellipses and emphasis in original).

⁶⁸ Jabbour interview.

painted on almost every existing white section of wall). Every light bulb that was at the theatre was carefully extracted from its proper place and found smashed on the ground. When I entered the trailer, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw windows knocked out, broken glass, a destroyed heating unit and an intercom telephone smashed to pieces and a couch that had been slashed from one end to another by a very sharp object.

. . . [T]o the destroyers of beauty, please look again at your idle playtime and remember that more hard work was poured into that theatre than most of you put into study or your jobs in a whole year.

This, the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, is worth a lifetime of hard work for all of Ypsilanti and we cannot afford setbacks however they are intended.⁶⁹

Clara Owens saw Riecker's statement in the newspaper and responded with a letter of her own, which the *Ypsilanti Press* published on November 30. In her letter, Owens implies that negligence on the part of YGT leadership had more to do with the vandalism than with anything else. She raised a number of questions. The newspaper appended an "Editor's note" in which board members, Jabbour and Felheim, addressed each question. Both items are worth quoting at length.

I was both saddened and amused to find in last Friday's edition of our paper a letter from Mrs. Judith Riecker of Ann Arbor, who has now achieved the honor of being a vice president of Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.

The YGT season closed Sept. 4. Mrs. Riecker revisited the site of the temporary theatre last week. She was horrified to find that vandals had destroyed the expensive foam rubber cushions which had been left out on the bleachers; the plastic chairs; even the toilets and the trailer furnishings; (I was a director last summer, but I didn't know we had bought a trailer!)

I believe that Ypsilanti is proud of what was accomplished last summer in the way of performances – planned by Solomos and myself . . .

There is no reason to think that Ypsilanti youths, or EMU youths, or Ann Arbor youths, damaged the theatre residue. There is no proof.

It seems to me that the responsible people would see that expensive equipment was stored properly and made available for next year. Instead there is a necessity of spending even more public money to replace it.

I have kept quiet for many months, hoping that the president and his vice presidents would learn from experience or from other people. I see no evidence that this has happened.

I should like to ask: when will the stockholders have an audited

⁶⁹ Judith T. Riecker, letter to the editor, *Ypsilanti Press*, 25 November, 1966.

statement of the amount of money spent last summer and for what; what kind of arrangement has been made with Kirschner, the spender and leader of last summer; who has been approached for artistic director and with what programs for next summer; what foundations have been approached for money and with what budgets of the past and for the future?

This theatre bears Ypsilanti's name – Ypsilanti would bear the disgrace of a bankrupt organization, in debt to individuals, industries and the state and federal governments.

If 20 of the donors will sign a petition for a special meeting, to ask these and other questions of the Board of Directors, I will be present to give the record of the theatre, from March when I resigned as president to Sept. 29, when I was no longer a Director.

I love Ypsilanti and I love YGT. I would do nothing to harm them. But I believe that people are using YGT for their own ends rather than selflessly helping YGT to gain stature.

If you want to know answers, call me. I, too, want to know where the money went and why.⁷⁰

Marvin Felheim's and Zeke Jabbour's answers to Clara Owens queries were printed below her letter.

The trailer was a rented one whose owner had difficulty finding a place to move it. It has now been moved.

All equipment at the theatre site was insured and locked up. There was no particular reason to except [*sic*] that the site, on the Eastern Michigan University campus in the center of Ypsilanti would be vandalized.

The board of directors is aware of the pressing need for an audit report and has requested an audit from the accounting firm which Mrs. Owens originally engaged. Professional friends are now doing the legwork to get books ready for the audit.

At the present time Mr. Kirschner, who was originally employed by Mrs. Owens, is not on the payroll and no specific arrangements have been made or discussed with him for the future.

Our inquiries concerning the position of artistic director have been on an informal basis. No specific offers have been made pending the financial solvency of the theatre. However, the board has decided to investigate the availability of Mr. Solomos for next season, the only formal act it has taken on this matter.

More than 100 foundations have been approached and we expect answers within the next couple weeks. These foundations were researched so we know there is potential interest in the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre or at least no history of disinterest.

⁷⁰ Owens, letter to the editor, "Mrs. Owens Questions YGT Actions," *Ypsilanti Press*, 30 November 1966.

The board of directors has a proposed budget, as yet not finally approved, which will be presented to foundations. It is substantially lower than last year's budget, which exceeded \$800,000.⁷¹

The tentative budget for 1967 was calculated for seasons of three different lengths: 10 weeks, 12 weeks, and 14 weeks. Site and production costs were budgeted at \$309,711.50 regardless of the length of the season. The cost of a single week of operation was estimated at \$28,231. Table 4 illustrates how these numbers were used to calculate the various budget totals for the three proposed season lengths.

Table 4 – Tentative budget, 1967 season

Season length (in weeks)	x	Weekly operating cost	+	Site and production cost	=	Total budget
10	x	\$28,231.00	+	\$309,711.50	=	\$592,021.50
12	x	\$28,231.00	+	\$309,711.50	=	648,483.50
14	x	\$28,231.00	+	\$309,711.50	=	704,945.50

The YGT board met on 23 November 1966, but failed again to achieve a quorum. The nine directors who were present conducted YGT business anyway. Minutes of the meeting were labeled an “informal discussion by the Board of Directors.”⁷² At the next meeting of the board on November 30, the directors would find themselves in the same situation. When a quorum was finally reached on December 7, the motions and minutes from the previous two non-quorum meetings were incorporated into the actions and minutes of that meeting.⁷³

At the November 23 meeting, Mayhew informed the group that he and William

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 23 November 1966, Farres Papers.

⁷³ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 7 December

Conlin, an attorney and board member, had met with Kimball Chun, a revenue officer with the IRS, two days earlier. Chun had told them that YGT owed the IRS “\$23,373 as of the ending of the second quarter.” The amount owed for the third quarter was not yet determined although a late penalty of over \$600 had been waived. Chun also warned the YGT board president that the government would put a tax lien on YGT assets to obtain the money owed them. This same debt could also be transferred to YGT directors and officers, though Mr. Chun had stated that he hoped “to postpone filing of the lien against YGT until January 15, [1967].”⁷⁴

Another meeting with Kimball Chun was scheduled for 28 November 1966. It was decided that Mayhew should prepare a letter explaining YGT’s present financial situation and prospects for raising money. Comptroller William Kenner was to provide necessary financial statements.⁷⁵

Several actions and proposals were discussed to alleviate the financial crisis precipitated by the IRS. It was moved and seconded that “all funds currently accumulating be earmarked for payment to the federal government, other than funds necessary to our daily operating costs.”⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the resolution had little effect. For the period of 1 October 1966 to 23 November 1966, disbursements had exceeded receipts by \$125.⁷⁷

In the meanwhile, YGT was still failing to deposit withholding taxes with each week’s payroll. Judge Breakey suggested that “some source of money be obtained to

1966, Farres Papers.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Receipts and Disbursements, October 1, 1966 to November 23, 1966,” Farres papers.

keep us current with the IRS. Perhaps the Board as individuals could underwrite such a sum.” It was decided that board members Mayhew, Jabbour, and Kenner should meet “to determine what this sum is.”⁷⁸

Mayhew also strongly urged the board members who had volunteered to solicit debt reduction from local creditors to “complete their solicitations by the next board meeting.” William Anhut reported that Post’s accounting firm would not be willing to conduct an audit of YGT books. The issue of an audit was tabled.⁷⁹

Kimball Chun of the IRS was a guest at the November 30 board meeting. The day before, YGT had presented him with a check for \$1223 from their tax account. A summary follows of what Chun told the eight directors present at that meeting.

[A]t the moment YGT owes the IRS about \$85,000; this amount covers April through September of 1966 (or the second and third quarters)

The IRS requires monthly bank deposits of all withholdings, then at the end of three months (one quarter), this money is to be turned over to the IRS. YGT has not done either of these things since April ’66. When YGT files a report, as [it] did in August ’66 for the second quarter and on November 1 for the third quarter, this becomes a collection problem. Mr. Chun said he should file a tax lien now, but he has requested that the IRS not file this until January 15. He said that he understood that a lien filed at the current time would undoubtedly crush our fund-raising drive.

If YGT does not offer voluntary payment after a lien is placed on our property, all assets and equity will be seized.

For corporations, the IRS can also assess, as a 100% penalty assessment, those officers who seem liable for non-payment.⁸⁰

The last statement means that, should the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre fail to pay the IRS, each director, and any other person the IRS deemed liable, would be assessed the full amount that YGT owed. If the IRS determined that fifty people were liable, those fifty people would each receive a bill for the full amount of withholding tax owed.

⁷⁸ YGT minutes, 23 November 1966.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Notes attached to Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek

After Chun's remarks, discussion turned to the imperative need to assemble enough directors at the next week's meeting to obtain a quorum. YGT had to make important decisions and make them quickly. Chun was asked to return to speak with the board the next week. All other business was tabled.⁸¹

Eighteen board members attended next meeting on December 7 – Pearl Harbor Day. Kimball Chun was there with grim news for the group. He had not been able to convince his supervisors to delay filing a tax lien on YGT. He would have to file the lien at the Washtenaw County Building within a week. Chun remarked that YGT's current weekly expenses were high, considering the theatre's stated intention to pay the IRS only those monies above the weekly operating costs. He also told the group, "Time can be bought," if a bond at perhaps twice the value of the debt could be filed with the IRS.⁸² However, YGT had little prospect of raising money for such a bond.

After Chun's presentation, the board discussed fundraising strategies, looking for methods that would bring quick results. One of the ideas they decided to pursue was asking Gus County to solicit help from AHEPA. County was national treasurer of the Greek organization and a YGT board member in his first term, though he seldom attended meetings. Zeke Jabbour said he would approach UAW officials sympathetic to YGT. James Gousseff and Marvin Felheim were to approach area craft unions. John Mayhew promised to contact the Greater Michigan Foundation, which had bestowed the Outstanding Community Achievement of the Year Award on YGT, to see if they might be willing to grant financial aid. Marvin Felheim agreed to contact a fellow University of

Theatre, 30 November 1966, Farres Papers.

⁸¹ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 30 November 1966, Farres Papers.

⁸² YGT minutes, 7 December 1966.

Michigan professor who had supported YGT in the past to ask her if she would sign a letter addressed to the *Detroit Free Press* feature, "Action Line." This column solicited help from *Free Press* readers for various worthy causes.⁸³

In addition to these actions, it was agreed that the federal taxes accruing weekly should be deposited with each payroll. Each director was assessed \$50 to go towards meeting that goal. Bills were sent to every director not present at the meeting. It was also agreed that it was inadvisable to publish daily quotations of the progress of the current fund drive, which had raised just under \$6,500 to date. Such information would "primarily serve to prompt calls from creditors." Since the tax debts had to be paid first, other creditors could not be satisfied.⁸⁴

The December 7 meeting was not adjourned; instead, it was recessed so that during the next meeting the directors present would "be empowered to act as a Board regardless of the presence of a quorum."⁸⁵ YGT continued to employ this expedient throughout the rest of its existence.

The December 7 meeting closed with bad news from Judy Riecker. She had received word from sixteen foundations. "All were either completely financially depleted at the moment or were referring our request through proper channels." YGT could not expect immediate help from that area.⁸⁶

The next week, board members gathered to report on the outcomes of their fundraising efforts. Teddy Farres reported that "AHEPA did not officially endorse YGT . . . [but] Gus County . . . will draft a letter to be sent to all chapters, and after approval by

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ YGT minutes, 7 December 1966.

[AHEPA] President Kimon Doukas, this letter will be mailed with all haste.” The UAW had received YGT’s promotional appeal and “indicated that we may receive substantial help from their organization.” They promised a decision “some time next week.” Twenty letters had been sent to “international unions with offices in the Detroit area.” A letter was being drafted to send to the *Detroit Free Press*’ “Action Line.” Thirteen of the thirty-one board members had paid their \$50 assessment. Board members Marsh and Hein were assigned the task of seeking payment from the remainder. No positive news had been received from any of the solicited foundations.⁸⁷

Zeke Jabbour told the board that YGT had received a letter from the Michigan Employment Security Commission. The letter warned the theatre group that their case would “be turned over to the state attorney general within ten days if payment is not forthcoming.” Immediately following this announcement, Eva-Dean Elwell, chair of the YGT Women’s Committee, presented the board with a check for \$140 – the proceeds from a bake sale.⁸⁸

On 14 December 1966, the Internal Revenue Service filed a tax lien against the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Seven members of the YGT board were present for the weekly meeting on December 20, but there was little to discuss. News of the lien had not reached the papers, but not many doubted it soon would. Very few foundations had responded to YGT’s pleas for assistance in the past week and those that had responded did so in the negative. Peter Fletcher suggested to the rest of the board,

That a membership meeting be called to give the entire membership the facts regarding the status of YGT. It was indicated that a positive frame of mind should be presented and the steps which have been taken and are

⁸⁷ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 14 December 1966, Farres Papers.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

being taken should be emphasized

Several possible programs were discussed:

1. sponsorship by one or several universities
2. endowment by an individual
3. government subsidy

Mr. Siegel suggested that the Dow family might be considered for approach under the second category, if Judy Riecker concurs [*sic*].⁸⁹

On December 22, news of the federal tax lien was published in the *Ypsilanti Press*. By this time, the Michigan Employment Security Commission had also filed a lien on YGT assets for monies due to it. YGT officials were quoted as saying that the liens did not create “an appreciable change in the financial picture” of the organization because amounts owed were included in the year-end deficit of the theatre, which had previously been reported.⁹⁰

In reality, the “financial picture” for YGT dimmed significantly after this announcement. Even IRS agent Kimball Chun had predicted that such an announcement would “undoubtedly crush [YGT’s] fund-raising drive.”⁹¹ Potential donors, from foundations to individuals, looked with disfavor on an organization that failed to pay its taxes. Additionally, the liens meant that any money donated to YGT must go directly to the government and not the theatre. According to production committee chair, James Gousseff, the IRS involvement over the failure to pay withholding taxes, “made us a very suspect organization with anybody who maintained any kind of payroll at all Once the IRS was involved, we were dead ducks.”⁹²

The board met on December 27 to discuss the situation. The value of making a

⁸⁹ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 20 December 1966, Farres Papers.

⁹⁰ “State, U.S. Sue Greek Theatre,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 22 December 1966.

⁹¹ Notes attached to YGT minutes, 30 November 1966.

⁹² Gousseff interview.

statement to the newspaper was debated. It was decided that John Mayhew should meet with *Ypsilanti Press* reporter Eileen Harrison and the new editor of the paper, Tom Mercy “so that they will receive the full picture of the situation.” A tentative date for a meeting of the full membership was set for 12 January 1966. It was agreed that certain civic leaders should be invited to the next board meeting so that the board could explain YGT’s situation and solicit their support.

The fundraising news was both pleasant and unpleasant. The “Action Line” article in the *Detroit Free Press* had generated some positive responses. The board minutes report that, as a result of the article, “the Mott Foundation is sending money [\$1,000], the Besser Foundation indicates strong interest, [and] the Teamsters are sympathetic and have directed us to the International Union for aid.” However, the UAW had notified YGT that they were unable to help the theatre at this time and the Dow family declined to “take over complete sponsorship” due to “other obligations recently assumed by them.”⁹³

On 4 January 1967, sixteen members of the YGT board met with the leaders of the Chamber of Commerce, the Jaycees, the Industrial Development Commission, and the Ypsilanti City Manager. Mayhew told the group that the purpose of the meeting was “to give a picture of the present status of the YGT, to hear questions and comments, and to find ways to make YGT prosper.”⁹⁴

After providing that “picture,” John Mayhew mentioned that, “Last year was a

⁹³ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 27 December 1966, Farres Papers.

⁹⁴ Minutes of a Meeting Held Prior to the Regular Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 4 January 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

most costly season, directly proportionate to the time element involved. Often higher prices had to be paid, in overtime or salaries, etc., in order that a first class festival might be produced.” Someone pointed out that “if a second season is not financially feasible by the middle of next month, [YGT] would be in a similar situation this year.” However, YGT officials reminded the community leaders

. . . that we have experience behind us, that we have a physical plant set up, and that some of the staff is lined up for a second season and therefore we are in a somewhat better situation than a year ago. We can go into February, but not out of it, still put on a season, and not suffer as in this last season.⁹⁵

This prompted City Manager Robert Semple to ask whether, assuming the debts for 1966 could be paid, could the 1967 season “break even? Would a major backer be needed year after year?” John Mayhew answered that even the Stratford, Ontario Festival was receiving a small government subsidy, though it was currently in its fourteenth year. However, “for each person attending the Stratford Festival, approximately \$10.75 is left in Stratford to build up the community.”⁹⁶

Chamber of Commerce Manager Donald O. Ruffer asked YGT officials why they had failed to gain any major foundation support.

Mr. Mayhew noted that there is a tendency among foundations to look for a place that they can see where their money is going, a building, etc. He predicted that it will be easier to get a building built than to get a season underway.

Mr. Semple said that the original emphasis had been on a building. Why has it changed? Mr. Mayhew said that foundations had asked to see a successful season, a festival underway, before they would aid with a building. Mr. Gousseff said that YGT had been told by a whole series of foundations and individuals that there were no sources of money unless the season was successful.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

This exchange summarizes YGT's foundation dilemma. YGT discovered it could not succeed without foundation support, but foundations would not support YGT until it proved it could succeed. The Greek Theatre was in a similar situation with its over \$37,000 in outstanding pledges. YGT desperately needed that money to pay down its debts, but many donors "indicated that they want to see if YGT will survive before they pay up their pledges or put more money into YGT."⁹⁸

The leaders of the various community organizations were urged to help YGT gain support by telling their members of what they had heard that night – "that the picture is not black, that YGT is alive." In response, Donald Ruffer questioned "whether YGT was making a mistake in putting off a general meeting to clarify the status of the theatre." Moreover, he warned that there were "several substantial Ypsilanti citizens" who were not supporters of YGT. Ruffer suggested that a larger group of Ypsilanti citizens of import should be gathered together and YGT officials should "tell them what you have told us."⁹⁹

At the board meeting which immediately followed the meeting with city leaders, the YGT board voted to pursue this idea suggested by Donald Ruffer. There was also spirited debate over the advisability of a general membership meeting, though no action was taken.

It was noted that at some point the Board owes it to the members to tell them the status of the theatre. Mr. [James] Gousseff said that at present we have little to tell them that we didn't say at the annual meeting. Mr. [Carl] Anderson [board member and EMU Vice-President] said that in the [annual] meeting, the Board had been most indefinite about the probability of a second season. He said that he felt it necessary to state that YGT is working toward a second season. Mr. [Richard] Skinner said that our

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

hopes for a second season had been frequently indicated.¹⁰⁰

The next board meeting on January 11 began with some positive news; \$4,565 had been contributed to the theatre in the past week. The bulk of this money was \$4,000 from Judy Riecker's sister. It was decided that enough of a surplus existed to allow YGT to reduce its debts to federal and state agencies.¹⁰¹ The Michigan Employment Securities Commission was sent a check for \$454.60, ten percent of the total YGT owed the agency, while the IRS was sent a check for \$2,600.¹⁰²

On a less positive note, Zeke Jabbour reported that Kimball Chun was "beginning to pursue the 100% penalty route." The first step of the process was to determine exactly who was liable for the debt. Chun was interviewing various people and examining YGT records to make this determination. It was noted that the process was likely to be a lengthy one.¹⁰³

The possibility of making an offer in compromise to the IRS was discussed. Apparently, this was not the first time, because Jabbour reported that he had already asked Chun about this. Chun had told Jabbour that he had "no personal experience with an offer in compromise in regard to withholding taxes" and that he did not know what the IRS's attitude would be regarding this."¹⁰⁴

There was also "some discussion regarding the EMU-YGT liason [sic]." The phrasing of this statement seems to indicate this was not a new proposal; however, it is

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 4 January 1967, Farres Papers.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 11 January 1967, Farres Papers.

¹⁰² Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 18 January 1967, Farres Papers.

¹⁰³ YGT minutes, 11 January 1967.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

the first time such a liaison is mentioned in available YGT minutes. Nevertheless, during this discussion it “was indicated that a complete umbrella of support cannot be forthcoming at this time, and that small services, such as use of the stadium, watchman and parking service, and perhaps aid with the sale of tickets are more readily available at the present time.”¹⁰⁵

It was also announced that board president, John Mayhew, had formed a new production committee. James Gousseff was again appointed chairman of the committee, which consisted of Marvin Felheim, Zeke Jabbour, Thor Marsh, Kip Siegel and, as *ex-officio* members, John Mayhew and Judy Riecker. The committee was to make recommendations for the 1967 season regarding the program, schedule, and organization of the staff. In addition to this, the committee planned to establish “a series of prejudicial dates . . . whereby a schedule will be established to prevent the loss of money through the pressure of time.”¹⁰⁶

On January 12, the meeting suggested and facilitated by Chamber of Commerce manager, Donald Ruffer was held at the Judge Breakey mansion on Huron Street. Peter Fletcher was one of the YGT board members present. He described it as “a useful meeting, bringing together the business community especially, and by the conclusion of the meeting it seemed that a positive attitude towards YGT was the consensus.”¹⁰⁷

When this was reported at the January 18 board meeting, Kip Siegel told his fellow board members

. . . he felt the time had come for the Chamber of Commerce to make an overt action for the theatre, to try to bring whatever dissidents there may be into line. The community has a responsibility to work together for

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ YGT minutes, 18 January 1967.

YGT Fletcher said that he felt there is not so much dissonance as ignorance. It is a conspiracy of circumstances which has put us on the defensive.¹⁰⁸

The board decided to pursue the progress they had made through follow-up meetings with various groups and individuals. Another important meeting was scheduled for February 13. This one was sponsored by the Detroit Edison Company in the form of a tribute and fundraising event for YGT. John Mayhew had been working for months to arrange this event. Invitations were sent to over thirty Detroit-area corporation presidents. It was hoped that some of them would form the nucleus of a Detroit YGT committee. The Ford Motor Company was underwriting a high-quality YGT brochure for presentation at this meeting.¹⁰⁹

Other important items of business at the January 18 board meeting include an announcement that Alexis Solomos had written to Marvin Felheim “indicating he was anxious to return to YGT for a second season.” Solomos included in his letter several suggestions to reduce expenses. Teddy Farres reported that only just over \$1,000 of the amount owed to local accounts payable had been written off by YGT creditors. Despite this sobering news, the board approved a tentative program and schedule for the 1967 season. They also authorized the production committee “to undertake preliminary investigations, without commitment, of the potential availability of leading artists.”¹¹⁰

The production committee plan was to present three productions in rotating repertory: a Greek tragedy, such as Euripides’ *The Bacchae*; a Greek comedy, such as Aristophanes’ *The Clouds*; and a non-Greek play “of appropriate scope and impact,” such

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

as George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. "Exact titles must await the determination of the availability of capable and interested artistic personnel." The festival was to include

. . . ten previews of the Greek plays beginning June 23rd with press openings July 5th and 6th; the non-Greek play to join the repertory four weeks later on August 2; the total repertory to continue through September 23rd for a total of ten previews and seventy-nine performances. Performances to be given (pending negotiations) evenings only, seven days per week.¹¹¹

It was no accident that Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* was included as the example of a non-Greek play. Zeke Jabbour had been exploiting his contacts with the Association of Producing Artists. Through the APA, he was a friend of actress Rosemary Harris, and she was in turn a close friend of actor Rex Harrison. According to Jabbour, Harrison had agreed to play Caesar for "very little pay" and Ruby Dee had expressed an interest in playing Cleopatra. Stephen Porter, of the Milwaukee Repertory, had agreed to direct the production.¹¹²

Clara Owens wrote a letter to YGT board member Peter Fletcher on 25 January 1967, a week before she was to leave the country for six months. The letter seems to imply that Owens encouraged Fletcher to join YGT and that he was working, at least in part, as her agent on the board. She told Fletcher, "I realize that I have put a tremendous burden on your shoulders. I don't think you can save YGT alone, neither could I. It is a thankless job, and sometimes when you are one vote against the rest, it is an impossible job."¹¹³

Owens was worried because she felt that the "people who have been running the

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Jabbour interview.

¹¹³ Owens to Fletcher, 25 January 1966.

operation are people without imagination or standards. They cannot plan a second season . . . it will ruin YGT forever if they try.” Owens proposed a take-over of the current leadership, much as she had to Wes Vivian two months earlier. “A great deal of the problem can only be solved by the complete resignation or abolition of the present officers. Who can replace them? I think there is a nucleus.” She made two “suggestions for progress.” The first was to get a quality executive director on board. She specified her first choice this time, Harlan Klieman of the Long Wharf Theatre.¹¹⁴ Secondly, Owens suggested an immediate search for new sponsors, though she complained that the “moneyed people of Ypsilanti have never contributed money . . . I don’t think they ever will.”¹¹⁵

During the first three weeks of February, the YGT board continued their post-season pattern of making miniscule gains in the midst of major setbacks. March 1 was set as a date by which a decision must be made about the feasibility of a 1967 season. It was decided that weekly operating costs must be cut and the position of bookkeeper was eliminated. Local accounting firms were to be approached to donate the minimum of service required to keep YGT books up-to-date. Several benefits were planned for YGT. The largest was an offer from David Bishop, YGT’s former box office treasurer, now performing the same function for the newly created Meadowbrook Theatre in the Detroit suburb of Rochester, Michigan. Bishop convinced Meadowbrook to donate the profit from its February 21 performance of Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labor Lost* to YGT. This netted the Greek Theatre \$354. Mayhew announced that the Detroit meeting had been cancelled due to a lack of response, so board members struggled to arrange individual

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid (ellipses in original).

meetings with various corporation officials in order to solicit their help. YGT creditors forgave over \$3,000 worth of debt, but the balance of accounts payable, excluding tax liabilities, still exceeded \$140,000.¹¹⁶

At the February 22 board meeting, Kip Siegel made a surprising motion. He told his fellow board members that, through his experiences contacting various funds and foundations, he had become convinced that “the reason we are not receiving help from them is their lack of confidence in the current board of directors.” Siegel, therefore, moved that “the necessary steps be taken to place the management of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre under the auspices of the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce.” The motion generated “much discussion,” but was eventually tabled in favor of another motion. This was made by Marvin Felheim and seconded by Teddy Farres. It called for a special meeting of the board the following Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. to discuss the proposal. Felheim and Farres wished for an opportunity for more board members than the ten who were present to discuss the proposal. At noon on Sunday, the appropriate representatives from the Chamber of Commerce would be asked to join YGT board. The motion carried.¹¹⁷

Seventeen YGT board members discussed the proposal on Sunday, February 26. They decided to “take the necessary steps to place the management of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre under the auspices of the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce by appropriate

¹¹⁶ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 1 February 1967, Farres Papers; Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 8 February 1967, Farres Papers; “Accounts Payable Report,” 15 February 1967, Farres papers; Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 16 February 1967, Farres Papers; Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 22 February 1967, Farres Papers.

¹¹⁷ YGT minutes, 22 February 1967.

legal means.” Chamber President Dr. Bradley Harris was the lone representative of that organization at the latter half of the meeting. He stated that the Chamber had no official position at that point but would be meeting to discuss the matter in two days with members of the Industrial Development Committee as their guests.¹¹⁸

Kip Siegel and John Mayhew made a presentation to the thirty-nine businessmen assembled for the special meeting. Several of these men were either past or present members of the YGT board. The YGT presentation was “discussed at length,” after which the Chamber of Commerce agreed to allow its staff to take over the business management of the YGT. The following motion carried unanimously: “that the manager of the Chamber of Commerce be authorized and directed to devote as much time as needed, with his staff, to promote the interests of the Greek Theatre, especially the business administration aspects, operating under the Greek Theatre Board.”¹¹⁹

The Industrial Development Corporation voted unanimously to go on record as supporting YGT and supplied \$5,000 from IDC coffers to “be expended through the Chamber of Commerce office for the operating expenses of the business administration of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.” Concern was expressed that Chamber and IDC actions might be considered a takeover of the YGT. A press release was authorized that would stress that this was not an appropriation of YGT, but rather a way for the entire community to support the Greek Theatre through the Chamber of Commerce. Chamber President Bradley Harris remarked on “the importance of retaining the identity of the

¹¹⁸ Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board of Directors, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 26 February 1967, Farres papers.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Boards of Directors, Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce and Ypsilanti Area Industrial Development Corporation, 28 February 1967, Farres papers.

Greek Theatre.”¹²⁰

Chamber Manager Donald Ruffer went to work immediately to get a financial statement the Chamber “could live with” and the Chamber quickly produced a new balance sheet with the aid of YGT’s still non-audited financial records.¹²¹ YGT assets, which consisted of cash-on-hand and office equipment, totaled \$10,915. YGT liabilities, which included accounts payable loans, interest on loans, and unpaid taxes, totaled \$505,837. The excess of liabilities over assets was \$494,922. Included on the balance sheet, but not factored into the above equation, were certain “questionable assets” totaling over \$203,000. Some examples of these questionable assets included: \$90,000 for improvements to the stadium, \$25,000 for costumes, the same amount for architect’s plans, and over \$29,000 in unpaid pledges.¹²²

The evening of March 1, the YGT board met to ratify the Chamber’s decision. Ruffer recommended that the YGT offices in the Ladies Library be closed temporarily and moved instead to a small vacant office next door to the Chamber of Commerce building. All purchases were to be reviewed by Ruffer or his assistant, Mariellen O’Neal. He told the YGT board that its duties now consisted of fundraising, production, and policy decisions. A motion was made that YGT accept these terms. The motion carried.¹²³ The Greek Theatre’s internally established March 1 deadline on the decision about YGT’s future was extended “up to 30 days.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Minutes of the Combined Chamber, IDC and Greek Theatre Committee, 1 March 1967, Farres papers.

¹²² “Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc., Balance Sheet,” 1 March 1967, Farres papers.

¹²³ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 1 March 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹²⁴ “YGT Gets Lease on Life,” *Ann Arbor News*, 28 February 1967.

There seems to have been some concern on the part of the YGT board that the Chamber wished to usurp its authority. Another motion was made “that all expenditures after the date of the removal of the office to the Chamber of Commerce be approved by board action at [YGT] board meetings.” During the discussion of this motion, “it was pointed out that the Chamber of Commerce would have no authority to expend YGT funds, but would assume control of the books.” Donald Ruffer agreed. The motion carried.¹²⁵

On March 8, Donald Ruffer gave a report that included several recommendations for the YGT board. Ruffer reported that the office had been moved with help from the Jaycees and equipment was inventoried as it was moved. The YGT women’s committee was working on further inventories of items still stored in the Ladies Library. Ruffer had met with former YGT accountant Harold Post and, as a result of that meeting, decided that an audit was not advisable at that time. Ruffer and his colleagues had also been looking into the status of foundation appeals. He told the board, “Frankly, we have found these records in very poor shape, so before we could do too much, we had to consolidate and bring the records up to date.” Ruffer also reported that he had been notified that the stadium had again been vandalized. “At the moment it is completely wide open. It is our intention to remove all valuable equipment no later than Saturday and put it in the old library building, inventorying it as we move.” Ruffer told the board he planned to file claims with the insurance company on this vandalism, although he was fairly sure this would prompt the company to cancel YGT’s policies. Ruffer saw this likelihood as another good reason to move out of the stadium.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ YGT minutes, 1 March 1967.

¹²⁶ “Recommendations and Report of Mr. Donald Ruffer to the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre

In addition to all of this, a list had been compiled of every YGT board member whose attendance at meetings was less than fifty percent. Ruffer recommended that these people be sent a letter asking them if they wished to remain on the YGT board. Five out of the twelve names listed were members of the Greek-American community, including Gus County, who had recently promised to solicit funds from his fellow AHEPA members. Dame Judith Anderson was also on the list, having never attended a YGT board meeting. Attorney, William J. Conlin, YGT's liaison with the IRS was listed, as was Carl Anderson, a vice president at Eastern Michigan University.¹²⁷ These last two men stayed with the YGT board and their attendance rate increased after receipt of the letter.

Ruffer also told the board that he had met with "the Internal Revenue man and contacted other main creditors. We have also been asked by certain board members to consider the voluntary bankruptcy route. It is too early, at this point to make any recommendations concerning this item." Instead, the Chamber had "asked Eastern Michigan University to consider taking over the theatre. Their regents . . . agreed to do so if it could be fully endowed." Raising the funds would be the responsibility of the YGT board.¹²⁸

Except for this last item, for which no formal proposal had been drawn, the YGT board endorsed all the actions and recommendations of Donald Ruffer. The rest of the board meeting consisted of reports by various directors on different fundraising

Board of Directors," 8 March 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

strategies, none of which were near the point of actually raising funds.¹²⁹

When the board met on March 15, the thirty-day extension was half over and no major contributions had been received. Judy Riecker suggested that the board cancel the 1967 season and begin working on a 1968 season. No action was taken at the time. Ruffer recommended that YGT make an offer in compromise to the IRS and the board authorized him to pursue the matter.

On March 22, Ruffer presented the YGT board with four major recommendations. The first was that YGT make an offer in compromise to the IRS of \$20,000; “\$2,000 down, \$9,000 on acceptance and \$9,000 one year from the acceptance date.” Ruffer derived these amounts from YGT’s cash-on-hand, which nearly totaled \$2,000 and the unpaid pledges receivable, which totaled \$29,000. Ruffer believed that at least \$18,000 in unpaid pledges could be garnered through a strongly worded letter reminding all delinquent pledge makers that if the corporation were to go bankrupt, “their pledge would be collectible in full anyway.”¹³⁰

Secondly, Ruffer’s recommended “that it be decided at once that there not be a 1967 season.” He gave three reasons for this recommendation. The experience of the 1966 season had shown that starting at such a late date would make it difficult to produce a festival with any fiscal responsibility or possibility of maintaining YGT’s reputation for quality. Secondly, “from a practical view point,” YGT “could not function during 1967.” It would take at least a year to finalize any offer in compromise to the IRS and then there

¹²⁹ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 8 March 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹³⁰ Ruffer to the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Board of Directors, 22 March 1967, Farres papers.

were all the other creditors “to be taken care of in some form.”¹³¹

Ruffer’s third recommendation was

That Eastern Michigan University be requested to expand its present dramatics and theatre program to include a Summer Theatre Program involving the Greek Theatre Concept; that the expansion of the program be based on the premise that pledges not assigned to current debt, new pledges, and other gifts be made payable to Eastern Michigan University with the agreement that if \$150,000 is collected prior to October 1, 1967, Eastern Michigan University will operate a 1968 Summer Theatre. It is further agreed that if the \$150,000 is not collected by October 1, 1967, the funds will be returned to the donors.¹³²

Finally, Ruffer recommended that Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc. continue to operate on a limited basis, with the Chamber in control of the business management, through 1967 or at least until the IRS accepted the offer in compromise. If that occurred, and if enough money could be raised, the plan was for Eastern Michigan University to “purchase any or all assets of the corporation from the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. Such items as the stadium improvements, stage, and other items.” These were items that could conceivably become part of a forced sale of the theatre’s assets by YGT’s creditors. Ruffer did not think that YGT creditors would force a sale of assets while tax liens were in effect. It would not be in their interest to do so. Once the federal government was paid, however, Ruffer did view this as a danger to YGT. He believed, “It is possible the creditors could receive between twenty and thirty cents on the dollar” from such a forced sale. Under Ruffer’s plan, EMU would purchase what they wanted of YGT’s assets at a nominal price then they would operate a 1968 Summer Theatre Program with some, as yet unspecified, emphasis on Greek theatre. The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc. would no

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

longer exist, but the Greek Theatre concept would survive.¹³³

Ruffer identified one problem with the plan to avoid a forced sale by selling YGT assets to EMU. He warned the board, “there may be some creditors who, if they are not paid at least some money, would go into bankruptcy. We had hoped, as had an anonymous donor, that there would be a way to forestall this eventuality. However, after many conversations with attorneys and others, it has been found that at present, this would be an impossibility.” Ruffer had discovered that there was no legal way to pay the other creditors before the state and federal governments were paid. The tax liens made this part of the plan unworkable.¹³⁴

The proposed “way to forestall this eventuality” had been devised by Kip Siegel, who was the anonymous donor to whom Ruffer referred. Siegel had tried to circumvent the liens by making the following offer to EMU President, Harold Sponberg.

If Eastern Michigan University with the assistance of the Chamber of Commerce would ascertain which creditors might go out of business if they are not paid by the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, and if Eastern Michigan University would tell me what the bills amount to, then I would be willing to contribute 50% of the certified bills to Eastern Michigan so that those creditors would be partially rescued. Considering the rest as a tax deduction, those creditors would then suffer only a 25% loss, and subtracting a profit factor, their loss, might only be 10%. Please don't inform me who the creditors are.¹³⁵

Siegel asked that EMU verify that his gift was tax deductible and hire a certified public accounting firm to protect that verification. He offered to pay the firm's fees as part of his gift. Siegel may also have offered to pay \$50,000 to the new EMU-Greek Theatre escrow account. Siegel wrote, “I feel that the \$50,000 to Eastern Michigan and

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Siegel to Sponberg, 16 March 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

the subsequent paying of debts would allow you to take over the Greek theatre some time in the future.” It is not clear from this sentence whether he meant that he would pay creditor’s losses up to \$50,000 or whether he planned on making an additional gift in that amount.¹³⁶ Later references to an anonymous donor willing to donate \$50,000, providing it could be matched, add weight to the supposition that Siegel intended the money as an additional gift.¹³⁷

Siegel’s letter to President Sponberg was dated March 16. Apparently, by March 22, when Ruffer made his recommendations to the board, the men had discovered that Siegel’s proposal could not legally be pursued. Nevertheless, Siegel helped at least one YGT creditor in this way, though it may well have been after the tax liens had been removed. YGT owed more to the Jabbour Building Company than any other creditor besides the federal government; the debt totaled just over \$70,000. Zeke Jabbour maintains that “in essence [Siegel] saved my company. He didn’t give me all the money [YGT owed], but he gave me enough to survive.”¹³⁸

The YGT board met the evening of March 22 to deliberate Ruffer’s recommendations. Before discussion could begin, however, the board had to deal with a number of resignations. Zeke Jabbour resigned as Acting Executive Director but remained a member of the board. Judy Riecker resigned as Development Committee Chair, but also stayed on as a board member. Kip Siegel and Judge Breakey resigned completely from the YGT board. It is not clear from available records exactly why Siegel and Breakey resigned. It may have been the Ruffer recommendations or it may

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Lou Cartier, “Greek Theatre Has 11 Days to Raise 99% of Its Goal,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 20 September 1967.

¹³⁸ Jabbour interview.

have been any of a number of other frustrations. The remainder of the board, sixteen strong, ratified all four of Ruffer's recommendations.¹³⁹

The next day, the *Ypsilanti Press* reported the results of the board meeting. It was the lead story and the headline read "Greek Theatre Cancels '67 Season; Hopes for '68."¹⁴⁰ Two days later, the newspaper ran an article about the plan for Eastern Michigan University to absorb the Greek Theatre concept. EMU President Harold Sponberg was to present the plan to the university regents on April 10. When asked how he thought the regents might react, Sponberg replied, "It's a question of whether the University wants to become a load-bearing operator . . . whether it wants to share in the success or failure. You can't be half pregnant. The regents are keenly aware of all the ramifications of the Greek Theatre program." Sponberg also told the *Press* reporter, "Previously, EMU had been asked if it would be willing to contract with the YGT and the Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce – Industrial Development Corp. to put on the season." Sponberg did not rule out that possibility.¹⁴¹ The regents would make it clear, however, that EMU funds were not to be used to support this project, nor was EMU to be responsible for any fundraising.¹⁴²

The article also quoted James Gousseff as a YGT board member and as director of theatre for EMU's Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts. Gousseff told the *Press* reporter, "if the theatre relates to the overall program at the University, it could be of

¹³⁹ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 22 March 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁴⁰ "Greek Theatre Cancels '67 Season; Hopes for '68," *Ypsilanti Press*, 25 March 1967.

¹⁴¹ "Eastern's Regents Will Consider Becoming 'Umbrella ' for YGT," *Ypsilanti Press*, 25 March 1967.

¹⁴² "EMU to Accept Theatre Donations," *Ypsilanti Press*, 10 April 1966.

immense value to the drama department There are many ways to organize the program within the confines of the University.”¹⁴³

Another newspaper article outlined the potential benefits of an association between YGT and EMU.

First, the theatre would gain prestige as a result of its association with the university and consequently might bring about increased contributions.

Second, the university would be able to use its broader purchasing power to obtain supplies for the theatre at a lower cost

Finally, the university would provide a tax umbrella for contributions, making tax-free contributions possible. Under the present situation, a much smaller amount of a contributor’s income may be designated as a tax deduction and thus large donations are discouraged.¹⁴⁴

On April 10, the EMU Board of Regents approved three resolutions by a vote of six to one.

1. That Eastern Michigan University accept deposits of gifts and grants for the purpose of expanding the University’s drama and theatre program to include a summer theatre program.
2. That on October 1, 1967, Eastern Michigan University report to the Board of Regents the amount of funds on deposit and a decision be made as to the feasibility of a 1968 summer theatre program.
3. If sufficient funds are not received to finance the 1968 summer theatre, funds earmarked for this purpose will be returned to the donors.¹⁴⁵

It is interesting to note that the YGT board never formally voted to accept this arrangement. On April 12, “it was the consensus [of the board] that more clarification of the [EMU Board of Regents’] resolution is needed before any action can be taken.” Instead, the YGT board gave Ruffer a vote of confidence “to continue working with EMU in the interests of the Theatre.”¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, YGT officials made positive

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Philip Block, “Greek Theatre Closes for ’67,” *Michigan Daily*, 26 March 1967.

¹⁴⁵ Ruffer to the Board of Directors of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 12 April 1967, Farres papers.

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of the Board of Director’s Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 12 April

statements to the press about the regents' decision. John Mayhew said he was "‘very pleased’ about the action which he felt definitely ‘increases the possibility of a 1968 summer season for the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.’" James Gousseff said he was "‘completely delighted’ with the action, which is ‘exactly the kind of support the theatre requested.’"¹⁴⁷ Throughout the remainder of 1967, Donald Ruffer and the YGT board proceeded as if the regents' resolution had received formal approval from the YGT board.

It is not clear exactly how much input Eastern Michigan University's Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts had into the regents' decision to ally its program with the Greek Theatre. Clearly, James Gousseff was in favor of the proposal and Gousseff enjoyed strong support from the department head, John Sattler. George Bird, technical director for the EMU theatre program, recalls that the precise nature of the arrangement was never made entirely clear to department members.

The proposal was vague. I never felt we were looked upon as able to contribute anything to this professional program and exactly how we were to relate to this summer program was not understood. It was not likely that members of the department would be asked to perform in their areas of expertise – as actors, designers, or directors – we were not considered ‘professionals.’¹⁴⁸

Bird felt the proposal failed to address other implications as well.

If, indeed, we were to be involved in an expanded summer professional Greek Theatre project, what would happen to our students who had been involved for generations in summer productions at EMU? Would a regular summer program involving our students continue? Was the Greek Theatre program an add-on to existing activities and responsibilities or would the traditional program be abandoned?¹⁴⁹

However, Bird also stated,

1967, Farres papers.

¹⁴⁷ "EMU to Accept Theatre Donations."

¹⁴⁸ Bird interview.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

I was not personally overly concerned about the whole proposal simply because, with all the flotsam and jetsam floating around the community – the rumors about irregularities in spending, the negative gossip and letters to the editor – I did not believe they could raise the money. I don't think the citizens of Ypsilanti, especially those with the kind of money to support such a proposal, were particularly interested in having a Greek Theatre.¹⁵⁰

Donald Ruffer, in his April 12 report to the YGT board, notified the directors that the Chamber of Commerce had written to U.S. Senators Phillip Hart and Robert Griffin, and Congressman Marvin Esch, as well as state government representatives asking for swift action “regarding the Theatre’s account with the Internal Revenue Service.” He urged each YGT director to do the same. Ruffer strongly believed that, until the specter of the IRS tax lien was removed from YGT, fundraising success would be minimal.¹⁵¹

The IRS was still in the interviewing part of the process to determine the 100% penalty. Rumors were spreading that the IRS would levy the penalty, as the following excerpt of a letter from Peter Fletcher to Henry and Clara Owens shows.

The government is hot after the individual directors for \$70,000 *each* as penalty for not paying the tax. They have found an entry in the minutes . . . [30 June 1966], showing the directors knew the tax was not going to be paid on time and they want to nail them with it. A compromise has been filed by Bill Conlin for [a] \$20,000 settlement in full and now they are trying to get Hart, Griffen and Esch to push [the] I.R.S. to accept it and close the case. The 1967 season has been abandoned and E.M.U. has agreed to act as an escrow agent for up to \$150,000 in new gifts. This is so Kip Siegel can give money to E.M.U. and get the tax advantage. He can't give it to YGT or the feds would tap it. If the \$150,000 isn't raised by 10/1/67, E.M.U. gets out and returns whatever has been contributed. In addition, they are trying to get an IRS ruling that YGT will qualify like a church so the Towsleys can take up to 30% income tax rather than the usual 20% limit. \$30,000 is missing which Ruffer hints was taken by Kirschner.

Frankly, the publicity, the antics of the in group, the whole thing makes me sick – they have seen to it YGT is a bad name now and I see

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ruffer to YGT board, 12 April 1967.

nothing but ultimate disaster.¹⁵²

Fletcher was obviously disgusted with many of his fellow YGT board members, but he did not leave the board. The reference to YGT Executive Director Richard Kirschner embezzling \$30,000, is not confirmed anywhere in available YGT documents. Nor do any of the YGT interviewees believe this is true.

On April 26, the YGT board discussed some encouraging news. A group of prominent Greek-Americans from the Chicago area had formed a new Greek Theatre committee. They were planning a benefit for YGT on May 7. At the same board meeting, Donald Ruffer complained that, to date, only two directors had seen fit to write to their three elected federal representatives. He urged board members to complete this task quickly.¹⁵³

On May 18, a committee consisting of leaders from YGT, the Chamber of Commerce, and IDC met with EMU President Sponberg and three of his vice-presidents. They decided

that a 'chair' should be set up at Eastern to be endowed for at least a one-year period that would enable the University to hire a competent individual such as Tyrone Guthrie, Solomos, or some other individual to develop a program involving the Greek Theatre concept.¹⁵⁴

As a result of that meeting, two forms were devised to be sent to potential donors so they could direct their money either to the refundable escrow account previously described, or the non-refundable account that would be "expended for personnel to work

¹⁵² Peter Fletcher to Henry and Clara Owens, 20 April 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (emphasis in original).

¹⁵³ Minutes of the Board of Director's Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 26 April 1967, Farres papers.

¹⁵⁴ Minutes of the Greek Theatre Coordinating Committee, 18 May 1967, Farres Papers.

on the development of the theatre program.”¹⁵⁵ It was also recommended that a committee, made up of key members of YGT, EMU, and the community be formed to make recommendations regarding the hiring of that individual.¹⁵⁶

John Mayhew appointed six members of the YGT board to this advisory committee. They were Thor Marsh, Mildred Harris, Judy Riecker, Zeke Jabbour, Marvin Felheim, and himself. Donald Ruffer sent a letter to President Sponberg and his cabinet with the names of the YGT contingent. He also included his choice of Joseph Butcko, the new president of the Chamber of Commerce and Harold Marsh, the president of the IDC, to represent the community. Lewis E. Profit, EMU Vice-President for Business and Finance, wrote a note to Sponberg on the bottom of his copy of the letter. He told the university president, “I am not sure that I fully understand the purpose of such a committee. There is a large question in my mind regarding the feasibility of a close university formal tie with The Greek Theater, Inc. [*sic*] people as noted above.”¹⁵⁷

The EMU Advisory Committee did meet despite Lewis Profit’s objections, but not until June 28. Representing the university were John Sattler, head of the Speech and Dramatic Arts Department; Tom Murray, Professor of Speech; Gerald Fulford, University Finance Officer; Curtis Stadtfeld, University Publications; and James Gousseff. The meeting was described as “primarily an informative one, some of its members not having the entire background of the theatre operation.”

In the meanwhile, YGT officials had been in contact with Chicago’s Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Committee (Chicago-YGT). Chicago-YGT had volunteered to coordinate

¹⁵⁵ Lewis E. Profit to Harold E. Sponberg, 22 May 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁵⁶ Minutes of the Greek Coordinating Committee, 18 May 1967.

¹⁵⁷ Profit to Sponberg, 7 June 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

“a national fund-raising affair,” which would involve fundraising events “in many of our cities on the same day.”¹⁵⁸ Much as this idea appealed to John Mayhew and his associates, YGT did not have the contacts, organization, or resources to accept the offer.¹⁵⁹ It was decided that Chicago-YGT would organize “a very large event” with “a top name entertainer” instead.¹⁶⁰ Representatives from Chicago-YGT visited Ypsilanti on July 8. The EMU Theatre Advisory Committee planned and coordinated the visit which included presentations; tours of the city, university, and theatre; and question and answer sessions.¹⁶¹

The advisory committee felt it needed some preliminary plans to be used in fund raising. They authorized John Sattler to formulate an Eastern Michigan University Theatre Production Committee, which was to “govern the formulation and execution of plans for the EMU Professional Festival Theatre and such other campus theatre projects as deemed advisable.” Sattler invited the entire EMU theatre faculty to participate along with the Eastern Michigan University officials already on the advisory committee.¹⁶² The committee met twice and produced a production and developmental plan for the EMU Theatre Advisory Committee contingent, of course, on the availability of funding. The advisory committee voted unanimously to accept the plan.¹⁶³

The operational objectives defined by this document called for “the presentation

¹⁵⁸ Helen Anthony, Secretary of Chicago’s Ypsilanti Greek Theatre Committee to Caroline Lacy, Administrative Coordinator, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁵⁹ John Mayhew to Helen Anthony, 21 June 1966, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁶⁰ Anthony to Lacy.

¹⁶¹ Minutes of the EMU Theatre Advisory Committee, 5 July 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁶² John Sattler to Carl Anderson, et al., 17 July 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁶³ Minutes of the EMU Theatre Advisory Committee, 2 August 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

of productions of only the highest quality” and an annual professional summer festival, “which will include at least one ancient Greek masterpiece.” The 1968 season was to include three plays, performed in rotating repertory.¹⁶⁴ Another document indicates the committee was strongly considering “a classic Greek drama, a Shakespearean play or some other masterpiece in drama, [and] an American play of consequence (a musical is not ruled out).”¹⁶⁵ The season was to be fourteen weeks, including two weeks of preview performances for a total of eighty-one performances.

Developmental needs were estimated at \$96,000. Salaries for an artistic director with a staff of five account for \$69,000 of the total, while \$18,000 was to go towards office and travel expenses. Miscellaneous and contingency funds made up the remaining ten percent of the \$96,000.¹⁶⁶ The artistic director and his staff were to be ultimately responsible to the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts and Eastern Michigan University.¹⁶⁷

A delegation from the Chicago-YGT visited Ypsilanti again in mid-August. They were asked to raise \$50,000, which would be matched by an anonymous donor. Evidence indicates that this donor was probably Kip Siegel.¹⁶⁸ The resulting \$100,000 would be enough to hire the developmental staff as specified in the EMU production plan. It would not be enough to guarantee a 1968 season. However, the Chicago-YGT was composed of prominent and wealthy Greek-Americans. YGT officials were hopeful

¹⁶⁴ Memo from the EMU Theatre Production Committee to the EMU Theatre Advisory Committee, 2 August 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁶⁵ John W. Sattler, “E.M.U. Summer Professional Theatre: Random Thoughts,” 17 July 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁶⁶ Memo, 2 August 1967.

¹⁶⁷ Sattler, “Random Thoughts.”

¹⁶⁸ Jabbour interview.

these men and women could garner for their cause the support from Greek organizations and other foundations, which they had been unable to muster. They believed that, once the developmental staff was in place, it would be possible to raise the necessary capital to fund another season.¹⁶⁹

On August 30, John Sattler, Head of the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts, reported to Eastern Michigan University President Harold Sponberg that the advisory committee had

. . . held many meetings since mid-June We have discussed, planned, and cogitated, but no recommendations deserve your consideration at this time. We have \$250 in the escrow fund. Currently we are in a tread-mill waiting for individuals or groups to contribute the sums necessary to make possible a first rank professional summer theatre program. At present it does not seem possible that a miracle will come to pass by the first of October

I regret that it is not possible to report striking progress at this time. There has been one lead which may eventually prove productive. It may even develop that Eastern Michigan University shall decide to proceed with professional theatre for the future without the handicaps imposed by the several groups. It has been my observation that as of this time the cooperating groups have been long on advice and a desire to control, and very short on providing financial support – which is the principal reason for their existence.¹⁷⁰

At this point, the IRS had yet to give YGT a decision on its offer in compromise. YGT directors wrote letters to their Senators in Washington DC asking them to encourage the IRS to expedite the process. However, agency officials explained that the offer in compromise could not be considered until the IRS had evaluated the potential of the 100% penalty route. The large number of YGT directors and “their widely spread residence or business locations” had lengthened the time required to make these

¹⁶⁹ “Greek Theatre Hopes Chicago Visitors Boost,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 14 August 1967.

¹⁷⁰ Sattler to Sponberg, 30 August 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

assessments.¹⁷¹

On August 30, the IRS sent notices of a 100% penalty assessment to thirty-three current and former officers and directors of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. The assessment was for \$70,583.61. YGT officials were given the opportunity to request a conference with the IRS if they disagreed with the assessment. Several YGT officials did so.¹⁷²

On September 11, there was a special meeting of the YGT board to hear tax attorney Robert Schmidt's advice concerning the IRS situation. Clara Owens was among several other former board members in attendance who were there because they had also been found liable. Schmidt advised the group that it would be best to try to settle the matter on a corporate level for two reasons. They would be allowed more time to pay and corporate losses would be tax-deductible while individual losses would not. He told the group that the IRS would most likely be willing to accept another offer in compromise, but only if it equaled the full amount of the withholding taxes due to the agency, approximately \$70,000. Payment plans could be set up over a five year period at six percent interest.¹⁷³

However, before such an offer in compromise could be considered, IRS regulations required that "the officers and directors must waive the statutory period within which the 100% penalty may be asserted." A letter from IRS District Director, A.M. Stoepler to Senator Philip A. Hart indicates that it was "at this point that somewhat

¹⁷¹ A.M. Stoepler, District Director, Internal Revenue Service to the Honorable Philip A. Hart, United States Senate, 9 June 1967, Farres papers

¹⁷² A.M. Stoepler to Philip A. Hart, 8 September 1967, Farres papers; William R. O'Dwyer, Group Supervisor, Internal Revenue Service to Theodora Farres, 30 August 1967, Farres papers.

¹⁷³ Minutes of the Board of Directors, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 11 September 1967, Farres papers.

of an impasse has occurred since the majority of the officers and directors thus far indicated they do not agree to extending the period.”¹⁷⁴ The minutes of the September 11 YGT board meeting do indicate there was disagreement over the decision to make a new offer in compromise to the IRS. On a motion to offer the IRS \$70,000 to be paid over a five year period, the vote was seven "yes," four "no," and two abstained.¹⁷⁵

On September 28, John Mayhew sent a letter to the EMU Board of Regents on behalf of YGT requesting a six month extension on the escrow agreement. As reasons for granting an extension, Mayhew cited an upcoming benefit ball planned by Chicago-YGT and the hope that enthusiasm generated from that event would “carry over to other Greek organizations.”¹⁷⁶ The regents agreed to the extension but stipulated that funds raised must go towards a 1969 season, there not being enough time, in their estimation, to mount a quality season in 1968.¹⁷⁷

The Chicago-YGT benefit ball was held on October 28. It was a failure. Officials described the crowd as “dismal.” Over 5000 invitations had been sent and “no more than 200 people’ turned up at the \$15-per couple event.” The Chicago organization was not even sure it would have a profit to turn over to the YGT. Another benefit, this one an orchestra performance, was scheduled by Chicago-YGT for late November. This benefit actually lost \$8,000. The cost was absorbed by Chicago-YGT, and the organization disbanded.¹⁷⁸

On November 1, the YGT board learned that Jake Oxman of the fundraising

¹⁷⁴ Stoepler to Hart, 13 October 1967, Farres papers.

¹⁷⁵ YGT minutes, 11 September 1967.

¹⁷⁶ Mayhew to Board of Regents, Eastern Michigan University, 28 September 1967, YGT collection, EMU Archives.

¹⁷⁷ Louis Cartier, “Greek Theatre Life Extended,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 October 1967.

¹⁷⁸ “Theatre Benefit Ball Is Failure,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 31 October 1967.

corporation of Laurence Lee was interested in contracting with the theatre to raise funds for a 1968 season. His plan involved a six week period to raise a preliminary budget of \$15,000 to \$25,000 and an eight month period during which his company would continue to raise funds, manage the box office, and work on audience development. The fee for the first six week period would be \$7,000 and additional \$44,000 would pay for the second period of service.¹⁷⁹

By November 14, the YGT Women's Committee had committed \$1,000 towards Mr. Oxman's fee. Fred Shaefer, a long-time member of the board offered a total of \$2,100 from himself and two others. Thor Marsh offered \$400 from himself and \$500 from Oscar Haab, a wealthy Ypsilanti restaurateur and property owner, bringing the total to \$4,000." John Mayhew sent his directors out to find the remaining \$3,000 by November 19 and a telegram was sent to Chicago-YGT in the hopes that they would help.¹⁸⁰ However, YGT managed to raise only \$1,000 more and Chicago-YGT was dealing with an \$8,000 deficit on their latest benefit. After some delay, a contract was signed with Oxman and the Laurence Lee Company for the \$5,000 YGT had succeed in raising. The new drive was another conspicuous failure for YGT. The company was unable to raise enough money for YGT to cover its own \$5,000 fee.¹⁸¹

On December 18, YGT directors who were liable for the \$70,000 debt were called to a meeting at the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce offices. There, seventeen of them

¹⁷⁹ Minutes of the Board of Directors, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 1 November 1967, Farres papers; Minutes of the Board of Directors, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 7 November 1967, Farres papers.

¹⁸⁰ Minutes of the Board of Directors, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 14 November 1967, Farres papers.

¹⁸¹ S.G. Cain, "Lingering Tax Debt Spells Death for YGT Hopes," *Ypsilanti Press*, 24 May 1968.

agreed to “underwrite a three thousand dollar portion of the debt.” This, combined with money in a YGT bank account, allowed the theatre to make a third offer in compromise to the IRS of \$55,000 to be paid within twenty-one days after the IRS accepted the offer. By 19 January 1968, with an IRS deadline approaching, only six members had fulfilled their promise. John Mayhew was forced to write a follow-up letter reminding the directors that the “government has made it absolutely clear that if we do not make good on our offer, it will assess each board member \$70,000.”¹⁸² Indeed, each member of the board of directors active during the 1966 season had received a bill from the IRS for \$70,583.61.¹⁸³ There is no record of how many directors responded to John Mayhew’s plea and paid their three thousand dollar share, though Mayhew clearly recalls being forced to pay other directors’ obligations out of his own money.¹⁸⁴

On 21 March 1968, the Eastern Michigan University Board of Regents voted to cut its ties with YGT and return all the money it had received from donors. The amount was a miniscule \$315.¹⁸⁵ On April 11, the IDC and the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce sent notification to the YGT board that, they too, were cutting off financial and staff support to the theatre organization. The IDC had spent over \$3,000 in administrative expenses and the Chamber had allowed their Managing Director, Donald Ruffer, and his staff to spend countless hours on YGT business.¹⁸⁶

In May 1968, the *Ypsilanti Press* declared, “The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre is dead.” The newspaper also reported that “a handful of officers, including [John Mayhew and

¹⁸² John Mayhew to Teddy Farres, 19 January 1968, Farres papers.

¹⁸³ Internal Revenue Service to Theodora Farres, 30 August 1967, Farres Papers; Internal Revenue Service to Carl Anderson, 30 August 1967, EMU Archives.

¹⁸⁴ Mayhew interview.

¹⁸⁵ “Greek Theatre Ties Cut,” *Ypsilanti Press*, 21 March 1968.

¹⁸⁶ William F. Anhut to Greek Theatre Board Member, 11 April 1968, Farres papers;

James Gousseff] insist the Greek Theatre will rise from the financial ashes of its 1966 season like the mythological Phoenix.” However, when board member William Anhut was asked if he ever thought YGT could manage another season he said, “Never. Never. This thing has been dead. People just refuse to believe it.” The article also reported some of the tensions that had arisen between YGT board members.

The government tax liability has stopped the YGT flat, destroying even the slim hopes and efforts at fund raising. And the delays on reaching a settlement have tired and angered many of those directors who might have been willing to try for a new season at some later date

Most, possibly all, of the directors feel they were not responsible for the failure to keep up the tax accounts and thus are not liable. Dr. Gousseff said members of the group pledging to back up the latest offer do not feel they are actually responsible for the tax problem but are seeking to preserve the name of the community, their own financial standing, and to prevent a handful of directors from having to absorb the entire amount.

Balanced against this are some other directors who feel that as long as the matter is not pushed to a head they can avoid a legal fight and the possibility of having to pay part of the IRS debt.

The agreement among the 15 to 17 directors to finance a settlement was called a ‘loose federation’ and several directors expressed fear that it would fall apart the longer the decision was delayed.¹⁸⁷

The “loose federation” held, though some directors were forced to pay more than their share. The IRS accepted the offer in compromise on 31 July 1968.¹⁸⁸ By that time, however, even the hopes of John Mayhew and James Gousseff had died. No further attempts were made at a second season for the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.

From the moment that the applause for the final performance faded into the night through July 1968, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre supporters struggled to overcome the deficit of the inaugural season and create a second one. The task proved to be impossible. Potential donors were leery of giving money to an organization so deeply in debt,

Thomas H. Brooks to Greek Theatre Board Member, 11 April 1968, Farres papers.

¹⁸⁷ “Lingering Tax Debt Spells Death.”

¹⁸⁸ A.M. Stoepler to Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, Inc. 31 July 1968, Farres papers.

especially after the federal government and the State of Michigan imposed tax liens on YGT. In the belief that part of their problems came from a lack of public confidence in the YGT board, members voted to place the business management of the theatre into the hands of the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce. Eastern Michigan University agreed to absorb the Greek Theatre concept into its own theatre program with the stipulation that funds to support the project would be raised by YGT leaders. They were unable to do so. In the meanwhile, the projected 1967 season was postponed to 1968 and then to 1969 until, at last, it became clear to even the most stubborn supporters of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre that there would never be a second season.

CHAPTER SIX

FESTIVAL COMPARISONS

“IF WE’RE OUT ON A LIMB, LET’S MAKE IT A BIG ONE”

Comparing YGT to other North American theatre festivals will provide a context for an evaluation of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. The task must be undertaken with caution, however. Drawing valid conclusions from direct comparisons between festivals is problematic because of the myriad of variables involved. Several of the more significant variables include focus of play selection, year of origination, geographic location, number of productions, length of season, and the size and professional status of the company. Furthermore, with regard to the first of these variables, YGT was unique in its exclusive focus on classical Greek plays. No other professional North American theatre festival before or since has been organized around classical Greek theatre.

This comparative analysis will be based on a variety of secondary sources. Eleven different festivals will be examined through scholarly studies, such as doctoral dissertations, master’s theses, and published histories, as well as a few less scholarly works, such as memoirs of participants and souvenir programs. The eleven festivals are the Oregon Shakespeare Festival; the San Diego National Shakespeare Festival; the Antioch Shakespeare Festival; the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival; the Colorado Shakespeare Festival; the Utah Shakespearean Festival; the Asolo Theatre Festival; the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival; the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake; the Alabama Shakespeare Festival; and the Georgia Shakespeare Festival. The amount of detail available about each festival varies significantly, further complicating accurate

comparisons. The focus of comparisons will be primarily on each festival's first year of operation, since one year of life was all that was achieved by YGT.

Once this general canvass of theatre festivals is completed, a closer examination of four of the eleven festivals will be made. These four festivals are the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Shaw Festival, the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival, and the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival has been selected because it is the oldest extant theatre festival in North America. The Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival was picked because of its Midwestern location in a suburb of Cleveland and for the fact that it began as a primarily Equity company. The Shaw Festival was chosen for its non-Shakespearean focus. Finally, the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival is an obvious selection, because the YGT was consciously modeled after it. It is not surprising, therefore, that of all the festivals examined, the Stratford Festival is the closest match to YGT.

A few generalizations can be made about the eleven festivals; the most obvious of which is that they are predominantly Shakespeare festivals. In addition, most of the founders of the festivals had a good deal more theatre experience than Clara Owens did, though often the experience was not professional. Many founders directed one or more, and sometimes all, of the productions in the initial season. Several cite the opportunity to direct as a primary motivating factor for launching their festivals.¹

¹ Angus L. Bowmer, *As I Remember, Adam* (Ashland, Oregon: Oregon Shakespeare Festival Assoc., 1975); Terral Sam Lewis, "The Utah Shakespearean Festival: Twenty-Five Years in Retrospect" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1991); Leslie Elaine Ellis, "The Early History of a University-Related Regional Theatre: A Study of the Asolo Theatre, the Asolo Theatre Festival and the Asolo State Theatre Through 1966" (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 1982); Jim Volz, *Shakespeare Never Slept Here: The Making of a Regional Theatre, a History of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival* (Atlanta: Cherokee, 1986); Amy Elizabeth Atwell, "Managing to Survive: The Evolution of the

Most of these festivals began quite modestly with small budgets, short seasons, and small companies. Nearly every one began as a non-Equity company, though many eventually made the transition to using union actors. The lack of Equity contracts accounts, in part, for the ability of the festivals to operate on small budgets in their initial seasons. Another factor that allowed many festivals to reduce start-up costs was the ability to use a pre-existing theatre facility, whether it was a roofless Chautauqua hall, an abandoned high school theatre, or a capacious civic auditorium.²

The geographic location of the festivals and the size of the communities in which they were based varied widely. However, many were located in areas that, for various reasons, featured a void in theatrical activity, which the festival was able to fill. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival began in the midst of the Depression in a small town far from any theatrical center.³ The Alabama Shakespeare Festival was no small town project but it, too, filled a void in professional theatrical activity in the Deep South in the early 1970s.⁴ When the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival was inaugurated, it was one of very few professional Canadian companies in existence. Its immediate success was attributed by many to a Canadian longing for validation as a culturally mature nation.⁵

This tendency to locate in areas where demand might be high may also help account for the fact that most of the festivals played to at least fifty percent capacity in

Georgia Shakespeare Festival, October 2, 1984 – December 31, 1986” (master’s thesis, Wake Forest, May 1987).

² These describe, respectively, the physical plants of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival.

³ Verne William Oyler, Jr. “The Festival Story: A History of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival” (Ph.D., diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1971).

⁴ Volz, *Shakespeare Never Slept Here*.

⁵ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:14-20.

their first seasons and several played to close to one-hundred percent capacity. Capacity varied tremendously, however. The tiniest house was the Courthouse Theatre of the Shaw Festival with 350 seats. The Shaw averaged ninety-five percent of capacity in its first season.⁶ The largest house was the Stratford Festival's tent theatre with over 1400 seats. Stratford averaged ninety-eight percent of capacity and organizers were prompted to add 150 seats towards the end of the season.⁷

Table 5 summarizes these generalizations as well as some other comparisons about which no generalizations may be made.

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) in Ashland, Oregon is the grandfather of North American theatre festivals. It was founded in 1935 by Angus Bowmer, a recently hired professor at the nearby Southern Oregon Normal College. It has operated continuously ever since, except for a seven-year hiatus during World War II. Bowmer was frustrated by the lack of a theatre program at the Normal College and he had been especially interested in the production of Shakespeare ever since working with B. Iden Payne. Bowmer was a student at the University of Washington when he met Payne, who was serving as a guest director there. Payne, in turn, had worked with William Poel, an early proponent of staging Shakespeare's plays uncut and in a manner approximating that in which they were originally staged.⁸

Bowmer convinced Ashland community leaders to include a Shakespeare festival as part of their Fourth of July celebration in 1935. Platforms and a façade, modeled after the Elizabethan London theatre known as The Fortune, were constructed on the stage of

⁶ Arthur R. Day, "The Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, Canada, 1962-1981: A History" (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, August, 1982) 20.

⁷ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:11.

⁸ Bowmer, *As I Remember, Adam*, 25-39.

Table 5 – Festival Comparisons: 1st Year of Operation

Festival	Year 1 st season	# years in planning	# productions	# performances	Equity	Expenses	Profit (Loss)	Capacity (% sold)
YGT	1966	3	2	70	Yes	\$922,894	(\$442,669)	1,900 (35%)
Oregon	1935	1	2	3	No	N/A	271	N/A
San Diego	1949	1	1	22	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Antioch	1952	1	8	40	No	2,400	N/A	950 (40%)
Stratford, Ont.	1953	2	2	N/A	No	N/A	(4,138)	1,477 (98%)
Colorado	1958	5	3	10	No	N/A	N/A	938 (71%)
Utah	1960	1	3	10	No	N/A	+	420 (75%)
Asolo	1961	1	6	25	No	23,104	(10,093)	N/A
Great Lakes	1962	1	6	N/A	Yes	55,750	-	N/A
Shaw	1962	1	2	8	No	2,238	144	350 (95%)
Alabama	1972	1	4	31	No	8,000	(34)	N/A
Georgia	1986	2	2	25	Yes	120,000	(30,418)	370 (81%)

Table 5 – Continued

Festival	Focus	Founder	Artistic Director	Performance Space	Press Support	Community support	Associated Institution	Volunteer committee
YGT	Greek	Clara Owens	Alexis Solomos	Converted Stadium	Strong	Mixed	None	Strong
Oregon	Shakespeare	Angus Bowmer	Same as founder	Converted Chautauqua	Good	Good	S. Oregon Normal Coll.	None
San Diego	Shakespeare	Community theatre	B. Iden Payne	Preexisting Old Globe	Good	Good	San Diego State College	None
Antioch	Shakespeare	3 College professors	Same as founders	Outdoor	Good	Good	Antioch College	N/A
Stratford, Ont.	Shakespeare	Tom Patterson	Tyrone Guthrie	Newly built Tent	Mixed	Mixed	None	None
Colorado	Shakespeare	3 University professors	Same as founder	Preexisting outdoor	N/A	N/A	University of Colorado	N/A
Utah	Shakespeare	Fred Adams	Same as founder	Newly built outdoor	Good	Mixed	S. Utah State College	None
Asolo	Restoration Comedy	Art Dorlag	Same as founder	17 th Century Italian theatre	N/A	N/A	Florida State University	None
Great Lakes	Shakespeare	Community group	Arthur Lithgow	Preexisting civic aud.	Mixed	Strong	None	Strong
Shaw	G.B. Shaw	Brian Doherty	Maynard Burgess	Preexisting Courthouse	Mixed	Hostile	None	Good
Alabama	Shakespeare	Martin Platt	Same as founder	High school auditorium	Mixed	Strong	None	Strong
Georgia	Shakespeare	Anderson & Garner	Lee Anderson	Rented Tent	Good	Good	None	None

an abandoned Chautauqua hall. The domed roof of the 180-foot diameter hall had been pronounced unsafe and removed in the early thirties making the remains of the circular structure vaguely reminiscent of an Elizabethan open air theatre. Bowmer staged two productions in this space for a total of just three performances. One of the productions, *The Merchant of Venice*, had received its initial mounting at Southern Oregon Normal College earlier in the year. Bowmer directed both *Merchant* and *Twelfth Night* and played major roles in each (Shylock and Sir Toby Belch). The casts were strictly amateur and consisted of college students and community members. Audiences were “pitifully dwarfed by the size of [the] arena” but the festival still managed to make a \$271 profit.⁹

There are really very few similarities between the OSF and the YGT. It is true that leaders with strong personalities founded each of the festivals. Nevertheless, unlike Angus Bowmer, Clara Owens had very limited practical theatre experience. Furthermore, the OSF began very modestly and grew gradually. It brought theatre to an area that had very little theatrical entertainment at a time when entertainment was difficult to afford. It relied on a labor pool of young people who, faced with a depression economy, had small prospect of employment elsewhere. As a result, as long as they could find a way to eat, many young actors were willing to devote all their energies to the festival.¹⁰ The conditions in Ashland in 1935 were entirely unlike those in Ypsilanti in 1966.

In contrast, the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival (GLSF) is a much closer contemporary of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. The initial season of the GLSF was in 1962. The festival was located for many years in Lakewood, Ohio, a western suburb of

⁹ Ibid, 82.

¹⁰ Oyler, “The Festival Story.”

Cleveland. It has since moved to a performance space in Cleveland's theatre district. The GLSF was born out of a desire to find a cultural event to fill Lakewood's large civic auditorium in the summer months. When the idea of booking commercial road shows was rejected, a newspaper article about a professional Shakespearean repertory company that had lost its home prompted the suggestion that Lakewood sponsor a summer repertory of Shakespeare.¹¹

The company was Arthur Lithgow's. He had been a central figure in Antioch College's Shakespeare Festival, which had produced the entire Shakespeare canon between 1952 and 1956. Lithgow had since left Antioch and, in 1962, was a lecturer in English at Princeton University and an associate producer at that University's McCarter Theatre.

Arthur Lithgow and the GLSF enjoyed strong community support from the very beginning. The board of directors was similar in composition to YGT's. It was made up of local business leaders with little or no background in theatre. Ten of these business leaders guaranteed an Actor's Equity bond for the \$55,750 needed for the first season's budget. This budget covered six productions. YGT's budget was over fifteen times that amount for only two productions.

Like YGT, the GLSF was well served by a very active and productive women's committee. The GLSF women's committee raised funds, formed a speaker's bureau, sewed costumes, sold tickets, and ushered patrons to their seats.¹²

Another similarity between GLSF and YGT is that they were both predominantly

¹¹ Margaret Lynch, *The Making of a Theatre: The Story of the Great Lakes Theatre Festival* (Lakewood: Great Lakes Theatre Festival, 1986).

¹² Donald David Shandler, "American Shakespeare Festival Theatres: A Sense of Occasion" (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1972) 210-221.

Equity companies. However, GLSF did not pay any star salaries of the magnitude of Dame Judith's and Bert Lahr's. The GLSF company consisted mainly of young actors, who had worked with Lithgow before. They were eager for the opportunity to play the great classic roles that Shakespeare in repertory offers.¹³

The Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival also kept costs down by using very little scenery the first season, just "a variety of platforms and a large scrim backdrop."¹⁴ Furthermore, the festival had the use of the large proscenium theatre rent-free from the city. Nevertheless, the GLSF did not turn a profit in its early years. No annual statistics are available, but by the third year, the festival's debt had reached over \$30,000.¹⁵ Still and all, that figure is very different from YGT's first year debt of nearly half a million dollars.

The Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario was also begun in 1962, though the initial season was a strictly amateur theatrical venture. The weekend of performances was billed as "A Salute to Shaw." It was not until 1963 that the producer began to promote the event as an annual professional theatre festival. The producer was Brian Doherty, a theatre professional with "over twenty five years of experience as a playwright [and] producer in Canada and the United States."¹⁶

As with so many of these festivals, the personality of the founder seems to have made a significant contribution to its initial success.¹⁷ Doherty is described as "a

¹³ Lynch, *The Story of GLSF*.

¹⁴ Shandler, "American Shakespeare Festival Theatres," 213.

¹⁵ Lynch, *The Story of GLSF*.

¹⁶ Day, "The Shaw Festival," 8.

¹⁷ Chroniclers of the following festivals make some mention of the positive influence of a charismatic leader: the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Shaw Festival, the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival, the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival, and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

singular personality who possessed experience, displayed leadership and exuded charm,” and was ““one of the most energetic people in Canada as far as the theatre goes . . . and his enthusiasm – you can’t really explain it. It just bubbled over.”¹⁸ Clara Owens also possessed a strong personality, a desire to lead, and even those who came to dislike her described her ability to be quite charming. However, Owens certainly did not have the same kind of experience as Doherty and her ability to lead does not always seem to have matched her desire to lead. At certain times, her charm tended to dissolve into rancor.

Doherty, like Owens, saw his festival as a way to revitalize his adopted community.¹⁹ Niagara-on-the-Lake, however, was quite a different sort of town than Ypsilanti. It was a summer resort community with only 3,000 year round residents. Its nineteenth century courthouse building held a small 350 seat theatre. Somewhat reluctantly, town leaders allowed Doherty to use the space for the initial season. The season consisted of only two productions, the “Don Juan in Hell” scene from George Bernard Shaw’s *Man and Superman* and *Candida*. Conditions were far from ideal for the opening of “Don Juan in Hell” on a sweltering night in June. The theatre was not air-conditioned and, as Doherty describes, “there were plenty of other handicaps: the flat floors with no elevations, the miserable small stage with no wings or flies, the uncomfortable stacking chairs.”²⁰

Doherty asked Maynard Burgess to direct the two productions. Burgess’ casts that first year consisted entirely of actors from various area community theatres. The actors were not paid for their efforts and the quality of their work was described as

¹⁸ Day, “The Shaw Festival,” 8-10.

¹⁹ Brian Doherty, *Not Bloody Likely: The Shaw Festival, 1962 – 1973* (Canada: Dent, 1974) 12.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 15.

uneven. Nevertheless, by the end of the short eight-performance season, income exceeded the modest expenditures of \$2,238 by \$144.²¹

The Shaw Festival in its first season was little more than a community theatre project and as such had very little in common with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. However, Doherty was pleased with the moderate success of his first attempt and decided to hire a professional acting company for the 1963 season. Actually, the 1963 company had a mix of professional and amateur members, but all were paid for their work regardless of their professional status. The season consisted of four plays by George Bernard Shaw performed in a three-week rolling repertory. Two of the plays were one-acts presented as a double bill during the second week of the season. The company of twenty players enjoyed near capacity crowds at the Courthouse Theatre but the season still ended with a small deficit.²² Doherty realized the Shaw Festival was severely limited by the tiny Courthouse Theatre and began to take steps to secure a new theatre plant for the festival. It would be ten years before he would finally succeed.²³

Part of the delay, and one of the things which makes the Shaw Festival unusual among the festivals examined in this study, were the frequently negative attitudes among the inhabitants of Niagara-on-the-Lake towards the festival in their midst. Residents were not eager to have their quiet town invaded by theatre audiences every summer and they were particularly displeased with the influx of “theatre people” who wore “beards, jeans and sandals” and were “a very bad influence” on the local young people.²⁴

In contrast, most YGT interviewees report little or no community opposition to

²¹ Day, “The Shaw Festival,” 19-20.

²² Ibid, 28-35.

²³ Doherty, *Not Bloody Likely*, 19.

²⁴ Day, “The Shaw Festival,” 30.

the actors who spent the summer of 1966 in Ypsilanti. However, chorus member William Cross recalls that,

A lot of the cast didn't like being there [in Ypsilanti]. They laughed at the prospect. It took half of them two weeks to stop laughing about Ypsilanti. They felt the town was ridiculous. They'd never been in such a burg. They all grew up in concrete in the streets of New York. They all dressed funny for 1966 times. There were guys (many of them were flamboyant homosexuals at a time and in a city that was *very* unused to that) with mid-thigh boots and long, long hair – way longer than Ypsilanti was ready for in 1966. By 1967 or '68, [long hair] was quite normal around here, but [in 1966] it was still extremely rare. They would walk down the streets and policemen would whistle at them. I'm sure a lot of townspeople just thought . . . 'I'm not so sure we want this element in our town.'²⁵

The Shaw Festival, like the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, began with a modest season and built support gradually. Brian Doherty did not assemble a professional company until he was assured that George Bernard Shaw's work would draw enough patrons to support a festival. The Shaw Festival does prove that success is possible for a festival with a non-Shakespearean focus. Nevertheless, it would be dangerous to conclude that YGT should have tried Greek theatre with an amateur company before attempting it with a professional company. The scope of the festivals, even when comparing YGT to the Shaw's second season, are so vastly different they make valid comparisons highly problematic.

The most useful comparisons can be made between YGT and the Stratford, Shakespeare Festival. After all, YGT was deliberately modeled after Stratford, so there are many similarities between the two festivals, and important differences as well. The most obvious difference, of course, is that the one only survived a single season, while the other is nearing its fifth decade of operation.

²⁵ Cross interview.

Tom Patterson had nursed the idea of a Shakespeare festival in his hometown of Stratford, Ontario since he was a teenager in the late 1930s. Stratford was a small city of approximately 18,800 residents. It had seen prosperous times but that was changing.

Stratford was a railway town. Its main industry, directly supporting nearly half the city's inhabitants and indirectly supporting many others, was the repairing of steam locomotives for the Canadian National Railways. Steam, however, was being replaced by diesel, and it seemed obvious that the repair shops were to be phased out. Scores of young people were leaving the city every year, and there was a real possibility that Stratford would die out as a vital community.²⁶

Tom Patterson was interested in creating a festival, but not out of any great love for theatre or for Shakespeare. He had no theatre experience and had never even seen a live professional performance. Rather, Patterson saw the festival as a way to revitalize his hometown.²⁷

He first began to act on his dream several years after World War II. By then, he was an associate editor of the trade magazine, *Civic Administration*. Patterson advocated the idea of the festival to Stratford city officials and anyone else who would listen. Finally, in January 1952, the Stratford City Council voted to give Patterson \$125 to travel to New York to "get advice from Sir Laurence Olivier." In February, the Stratford Chamber of Commerce formed a sub-committee to investigate Patterson's proposal. This committee would become the core of a later citizen's committee for the Festival, which in turn was the basis for the Festival's first Board of Governors. When Patterson went to New York in March, he "never got close to Olivier." Nevertheless, by exaggerating the import of a conversation he did manage to hold with a gentleman he described as a "sleazy agent" and another meeting with a representative of the Rockefeller Foundation,

²⁶ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:20.

²⁷ Tom Patterson and Allan Gould, *First Stage: The Making of the Stratford Festival*

Patterson was able convince the Stratford city council to continue their support. He told the council,

‘I’m very sorry. Sir Laurence Olivier can’t come because he is too tied up and is committed for the next two years, and we want someone before that. But we could have Charles Laughton, Cedric Hardwick, even a Broadway company. And the Rockefeller Foundation is interested.’²⁸

Not long after this, it was suggested to Patterson that he contact the renowned and successful British director, Tyrone Guthrie, for advice concerning the festival. Guthrie wrote back that he was ““most interested in this project, if it offers possibilities for a fresh advance in Shakespeare production.”” Guthrie was especially intrigued by the undertaking because, as Stratford had no existing facilities adequate for the festival, he would be able to influence the design of the stage and the audience-actor relationship. Guthrie wanted to direct Shakespeare without the trappings of a proscenium stage and in a thrust arrangement with “the audience closely packed *round* the actors.” In addition, the timing was propitious for securing Tyrone Guthrie’s services. He was ready to leave London’s Old Vic company, he had toured Canada in the past and was fond of the country, and he wanted very much to stage Shakespeare on an open thrust stage.²⁹

Guthrie traveled to Stratford and met with the citizen’s committee on 9 July 1951. He was surprised to learn they actually were willing to be guided by his advice and the committee was equally impressed by Guthrie. He warned them that the project was not likely to be a profitable one. The committee, however, had never really viewed the festival as a profit-making venture. Guthrie and the committee agreed that the festival should be a professional operation. To this end, Guthrie told the group they would need

(Toronto: McClelland, 1987) 25-26.

²⁸ Ibid, 48.

²⁹ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:29 (emphasis in original).

to hire at least two stars with international reputations but stressed his firm belief that the vast majority of the company members must be Canadian.

The Stratford committee decided to proceed with the project and Patterson was sent to Britain to recruit stars, a designer, and an artistic director. Patterson left at the end of August 1951 and returned by mid-October with commitments from actor Alec Guinness, designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch, and Tyrone Guthrie as artistic director. Guinness agreed to come for \$5,500 plus expenses, “a nominal sum . . . he could have made many times that figure more easily, and asked that the amount be kept confidential.”³⁰ Guthrie asked \$4,500 plus expenses for his services and Tanya Moiseiwitsch agreed to come for \$1,200.³¹ Patterson told the committee approximately \$150,000 would be needed to produce the entire festival.³²

The Stratford committee incorporated, becoming the Festival’s Board of Governors and Tom Patterson was hired as general manager for a salary of \$500 per month. Unlike, Clara Owens, Patterson was not a member of the theatre’s governing board, let alone its chairman. The chairman of the Stratford board was a deeply religious and capable Stratford businessman named Harrison Showalter.³³ Several chroniclers of the history of the Stratford Festival give a good deal of credit for the success of the festival to Showalter’s steadfast hard work and leadership.

A few other imports from Britain were added to the company, including actors Douglas Campbell, Michael Bates, and Irene Worth (Worth actually is American-born but she was working in England at the time), and production manager Cecil Clarke.

³⁰ Ibid, 40.

³¹ Patterson, *First Stage*, 100.

³² Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:40.

³³ Ibid.

Clarke and Guthrie proceeded to assemble a company of approximately sixty actors to perform in *Richard III* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. All but four members of the acting company were Canadian.³⁴

In the meanwhile, the Stratford Board of Governors turned their attention to fundraising. It was fundraising, or rather the lack of it, that nearly caused the festival to close before it even opened. Patterson's initial budget projections were unrealistic and his optimism about the organization's ability to raise funds was unfounded. A local fundraising campaign raised more money than expected, but Stratford organizers, like their YGT compatriots, discovered that large donations from outside groups, businesses, and foundations were slow to materialize. Cecil Clarke "felt Patterson's fund-raising efforts had been pathetic. He also felt, as did [board chairman, Harrison] Showalter, that the board had failed to give Patterson the support he needed."³⁵

By the groundbreaking ceremony on 15 April 1953, all work had been stopped by the Chicago company building the tent for the temporary theatre because the festival had no money to pay a \$10,000 deposit. Some members of the board wanted to postpone the festival for at least a year, but Guthrie, Moiseiwitsch, and Guinness told Showalter they would not be interested in participating if the project was delayed. Rumors that the Festival was going bankrupt prompted other suppliers to demand advance payments and to withhold much-needed shipments. When the board determined to go forward, "some board members resigned, judging their colleagues to be proceeding irresponsibly."³⁶

The Stratford Festival may well not have happened at all, if it had not been for the . . . persistence of the contractor, Oliver Gaffney, whose men were hard at

³⁴ Guthrie and Davies, *Renown*, 29.

³⁵ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:50-53.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 1:53-56.

work twenty-four hours a day Gaffney was facing disaster himself: he was not being paid and his bank manager was urging him to quit before he went bankrupt. Gaffney's response was: 'If we're out on a limb, let's make it a big one.' Later he remarked: 'It got so bad I could hardly walk down the main street. Everyone wanted to ask me why I was going ahead with the work when I wasn't getting paid. Even my own workmen razzed me.' Asked why he continued, Gaffney replied: 'I felt that if I stopped, the whole thing would collapse. As long as I kept working and the theatre came closer to completion, there was a chance that the thing might be a success – and we'd all get paid.'³⁷

Two anonymous donations, totaling \$35,000, allowed the Festival to continue and money from other sources soon followed.³⁸ The delay in the tent construction, however, meant that the company would be unable to rehearse on stage until June 26, just two weeks before opening night. Another rehearsal space was improvised across the river from the theatre site. Tyrone Guthrie described the difficult rehearsal conditions the first Stratford Festival company faced.

Rehearsals started in a structure out in the Fairground. A long wooden shed, roofed with corrugated iron. It was vast. It was dry. It had electric light. It had no plumbing, but the Fairground is remote and has been planted with lovely clumps of thick green shrubs. In the shed a replica of our stage had been built. Here we were to rehearse until the Tent arrived.

The whole arrangement was very satisfactory except in two respects. The acoustics of the building were such that the lightest whisper became an enormous booming noise. Normal speech was almost too loud to be endured by the naked ear, and totally unintelligible. Giants and giantesses seemed to be shouting through the vaults of a cathedral jointly designed by Cecil B. de Mille and Orson Welles.

The second drawback was the sparrows. Several dozens of them had built in the rafters of our shed. It was a sparrow slum. By day it was comparatively quiet; but towards evening, when the Business Sparrows came back home, their love-life became most obtrusive. Boy Sparrow would meet Girl and pursue her all over our stage. They were impervious to fear, or, for that matter, shame. Scenes of unbridled bird sexuality made the life of *Richard III* seem very anaemic and suburban. These dear little feathered friends would not have hesitated to make away with *their* nephews. Why, they had no compunction whatever about the death of

³⁷ Ibid, 1:57.

³⁸ Ibid.

their own offspring. As the weeks wore on and their eggs hatched, the nestlings fell to their death on the concrete floor below literally by the dozens

Days pass. The words of the plays are now known, but owing to the acoustics of the shed, no one has yet heard any lines but his own. Lips are seen to move, gigantic but unintelligible noises resound in the building punctuated by the thumps of baby sparrows hurtling to their doom. These noises make a Wagnerian accompaniment to the *miming* of two Shakespearean plays. It is an interesting new Art Form; *avant-garde*, but searing to the nerves.³⁹

Despite the nerve-searing conditions, the company worked hard under Guthrie.

When the summer sun on the metal roof made afternoon rehearsals too hot to bear, they began taking afternoons off, rehearsing mornings and evenings instead. According to John Pettigrew's chronicle of the Stratford Festival, "Many of the first-year company and staff were later to remark that nothing quite like Stratford could ever happen again for the simple reason that union regulation would make it impossible."⁴⁰

When the company finally moved into the tent, acoustical deficiencies were discovered there as well. Special matting was laid to help combat the problem. Work in the tent went on twenty-four hours a day. The company rehearsed from ten in the morning until ten at night, at which point contractor, Oliver Gaffney and his men took over for their twelve hour shift.⁴¹

The rate of ticket sales had been a concern for festival organizers in June but, by the time *Richard III* opened the Festival, sales for the season had passed the fifty-percent mark. The opening performance was completely sold out. Ninety-four critics from Canada, the United States, and even one from England were in attendance that night. The resulting reviews were mixed but the reaction from the first-night audience was

³⁹ Guthrie and Davies, *Renown*, 20-21.

⁴⁰ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 61.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 1:65.

incredibly enthusiastic.

At the end of the performance, the crowd rose to its feet with what was to remain the most memorable ovation in the Festival's history. Strangers embraced, tears of pride flowed, and the actors began to think the curtain calls would never end. Youthful company member Bruce Swerdfager . . . remembers [Alec] Guinness saying to him, 'They've got to stop some time.' But they didn't, and after five minutes Guinness finally stilled the chorus of cheers with a brief speech of thanks to the audience and to Shakespeare.⁴²

The exacting critic of the *Toronto Star*, Nathan Cohen, was there that night.

Cohen would become an enemy of the Stratford Festival, launching "vitriolic attacks" on the institution.⁴³ However, when describing that opening night over a decade later, he wrote,

When it was all over, when the lights came on near midnight and the actors started to come out and take their bows, we went wild.

We began in the conventional way, clapping hands. But that just wouldn't do. So we stood up, I mean we all stood up, as one, and applauded, but that wouldn't do either.

So then someone started cheering, yelling 'bravo' and 'hooray' and the cheers kept getting louder and the actors kept coming back, for group bows, for solo encores, and it went on, and it seemed it would never stop.

The people in business suits and the men in evening dress, the women in summer skirts and dresses and in gorgeous evening gowns, were screaming from the bottom of their throats, in praise, in gratitude, in a delirium of joy.

The lobby was a bedlam. People milled around, talking to one another, friends, strangers, distractedly happily. I don't remember how many times I heard it said, 'This is going to put Canada on the theatre map,' or, 'We've come of age – we've finally come of age.'

That first night at Stratford was the single most memorable experience I ever had in the theatre.⁴⁴

This reaction and the subsequent success of the Stratford Festival can be explained in part by the timing and the location of the venture. One Stratford Festival

⁴² Ibid, 1:6-7.

⁴³ Ibid, 1:7.

⁴⁴ Nathan Cohen, *Toronto Star*, 4 June 1966, as quoted in Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:7-8.

historian asserts that

Canada was ripe for a cultural explosion By the middle of the twentieth century, Canada had precious little to boast of artistically. It was easy enough to see the country as some kind of cultural desert. An increasing number of Canadians were unhappy with the situation, none perhaps more so than those veterans – Tom Patterson among them – who inundated the universities after the war.⁴⁵

However, there was a critical lack of performance spaces, training centers, and professional opportunities for Canadians serious about the theatre. In spite of this, a large number of Canadians were interested in the theatre. Amateur theatre activity flourished and in several major cities new professional companies struggled to establish themselves. Toronto was chief among these cities. However, there was no theatrical center analogous to New York City to be found in Canada. Canadian actors found it difficult, if not impossible to survive by their craft alone. The New Play Society of Toronto offered actors such as Donald Davis, Lorne Greene, Robert Goulet, Eric House, and William Hutt the chance to perform in the classics and in new Canadian plays. However, standard pay was only five dollars per performance. Little wonder then, that many Canadian performers went abroad to train and work in the theatre.⁴⁶

Tom Patterson took pains to explain the problem to Guthrie in his letter proposing the festival to the British director.

As you know, Canada is not yet 100 years old, and being a young country, has spent most of its time looking for bread and butter. As a result, there was no time for any of the arts – and we are therefore very backward in that respect

We have emerged as a leader amongst the ‘small powers’; become one of the wealthiest nations in the world and are in the midst of a boom such as has never been known in the world before. On top of that, we have a fairly large group who have seen some of the things we are missing. I mean those who have come back from the late war.

⁴⁵ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 1:16-19.

As a result of our boom, bread and butter comes fairly easily (although expensive) and we, as a nation, are casting around to find what is missing.

I think we have found it. When a ballet comes to Toronto, it is impossible to obtain seats after two days of ticket sales; the Metropolitan Opera played to the largest crowd in its history last month . . . [a production of a satirical review] played to nearly 100,000 people in a five week run just concluded. This may not seem exceptional to you, but when you consider that less than five years ago, nothing like this could have been possible, it shows the rapid maturity that is coming to our people.⁴⁷

Tyrone Guthrie was keenly aware of the Canadian situation and worked hard to keep the Stratford Festival a primarily Canadian effort. In October, 1953, Guthrie was quoted in *Mayfair* magazine as saying, "I think the success of the first Stratford Festival was not primarily due to the vision and courage of its promoters or to any merits which the performances may have had; but was due rather to the timeliness of the venture."⁴⁸ In *Renown at Stratford*, Guthrie's own account of Stratford's first season, he wrote,

The success of the first Festival was greater, in my opinion, than could have been achieved anywhere else in the world. It was regarded as a National Event; the Governor General attended both plays and was at pains to emphasize his view that the occasion was significant; in terms of newspaper coverage, it was given far more space in the American press than any Canadian event of the kind has ever before received . . .⁴⁹

These statements by Guthrie and others imply that the success of the Stratford Festival was intimately tied to the unique circumstances of the time and place of its creation. The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre tried to duplicate that success in a different time, in a different place, and with a very different kind of theatre. The story of the creation of the Stratford Festival bears a striking number of similarities to the creation of the YGT. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that a national longing for cultural validation

⁴⁷ Patterson, *First Stage*, 57-58.

⁴⁸ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:14.

⁴⁹ Guthrie and Davies, *Renown*, 26.

was a unique but vital element in Stratford's initial success.

Several of the similarities between the two festivals are simple to observe. The name of each city was a tie-in to the focus of the festival. Both festivals played two classics in repertory – one tragedy and one comedy. Both used open stages. Both encountered problems with acoustics in their rehearsal and performance spaces.

The two cities were like one another in many ways. They were small industrial cities, though Ypsilanti was slightly larger and in a less rural setting than Stratford. The two cities' failing industrial bases prompted leaders to look for ways to enhance the economic vitality of their communities. The emphasis on the potential economic benefits of the festival was stronger in Ypsilanti though; the first Stratford Festival committee did not expect their festival to be a profitable venture.⁵⁰

The founder of each of these festivals was a non-theatre person with a strong personality and drive, well suited to generating the initial support for a far-fetched idea. Both Tom Patterson and Clara Owens had difficulties, however, adjusting to the practical requirements of realizing their dreams.

At the end of the 1953 season, Tom Patterson wanted to continue as general manager, but the Stratford board, Guthrie, and Cecil Clarke (who was to be artistic director for the 1954 season) did not feel Patterson could handle the job. Patterson admits that he was near the point of a nervous breakdown by this time. He also reports a growing resentment towards him for the publicity he received as the festival's originator. Patterson spent some time in Toronto recuperating and when he returned he found all his files had been thrown out, "ostensibly to make room for next year's. Still, I found it

⁵⁰ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:34.

strange that only my files were dumped and none others.”⁵¹ These incidents are reminiscent of some of Owens’ experiences with the YGT. Nevertheless, the Stratford Festival seemed to be better able to survive the crisis of confidence in its founder, because Patterson, unlike Owens, was not the leader of the board.

The structures of the festivals also have much in common. Both were professional theatre operations from the very beginning. Consequently, the initial scale of the festivals was much larger than many other theatre festivals, which began with short seasons, small companies, and amateur casts. Both festivals operated under Stratford contractor Oliver Gaffney’s philosophy, “If we’re out on a limb, let’s make it a big one.”

A very important difference between Stratford and YGT, however, is that the Greek Theatre was dealing with theatre unions and Stratford was not. Actor’s Equity requirements decreased the efficiency of YGT rehearsals and increased both payroll and production costs significantly. Bert Lahr may have been performing in *The Birds*, but neither he, nor the Equity union steward, would likely have tolerated rehearsals in the Wagnerian Sparrow Slum, which Alec Guinness and the rest of the Stratford company seem to have taken in stride.

Both Stratford and YGT imported artistic directors to lead their festivals. However, the prestige and personalities of the two directors are a study in contrasts. Tyrone Guthrie had an international reputation as one of England’s leading directors. Guthrie’s “thin frame made him seem taller than his six feet four inches. His face was a mixture of a guardsman’s and an eagle’s. His personality was commanding, his wit coruscating and devastating, his devotion to theatre total.”⁵² Playwright Christopher Fry

⁵¹ Patterson, *First Stage*, 211.

⁵² Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:29.

said of his fellow countryman, ““Tony Guthrie went his own way, sometimes unexpectedly, but always fruitfully, quietly, but with such powerful radiations that it seemed he had only to walk through a town for a theatre to come to life.””⁵³ The Canadian playwright and actor, Robertson Davies, wrote of Guthrie, “He brings to his work a high degree of personal authority, linked to a personality which is sympathetic and approachable Actors . . . admire him and frequently develop a strong personal loyalty toward him.”⁵⁴

In contrast, Alexis Solomos was described as a short, quiet, unassuming man with a receding hairline and an embattled air. YGT production committee chairman, James Gousseff recalls that Solomos “didn’t have the pizzazz as artistic director that would have allowed him to work extensively as a speaker He was there for fundraising things but he was a very quiet person and shy and retiring even.”⁵⁵ YGT chorus member William Cross remembers that Solomos “always seemed like he was besieged I don’t think he felt he was in control of the cast.”⁵⁶

Both YGT and the Stratford Festival deliberately hired famous stars to lend legitimacy to their operations and attract attention from the press. In both cases, the strategy worked. Stratford garnered a few more reviewers than YGT, but the Greek Theatre’s critical reception was slightly stronger than was its Canadian cousin’s. However, in Stratford’s case, press coverage continued throughout the season with reports of its phenomenal box office success, while YGT was faced with nationwide reports of financial trouble and rumors of early closure.

⁵³ Ibid, 1:35.

⁵⁴ Guthrie and Davies, *Renown*, 38.

⁵⁵ Gousseff interview.

⁵⁶ Cross interview.

Stratford also paid far less for its stars. Tyrone Guthrie, Alec Guinness, and Tanya Moiseiwitsch all accepted salaries at Stratford that were significantly lower than what they could have received in England at that time.⁵⁷ In contrast, Alexis Solomos was paid more money than a comparable American director would have been and Dame Judith and Bert Lahr definitely received star pay as well as star billing.

Both festivals were run by local boards composed of leading citizens with very little experience in theatre. Both organizations started with very little money and initiated a local fund drive that exceeded expectations, but found support from outside groups and large donations from businesses and foundations very hard to come by. Delays in raising funds created numerous crises for both festivals. One of the most significant crises was inadequate time to complete each physical plant. Without the amazing dedication of their head contractors, Oliver Gaffney and Zeke Jabbour, neither festival would have mounted its first season. Both men worked incredibly long and unconventional hours and risked personal bankruptcy in order to complete their respective theatres in time.

Despite all these corresponding features, there are several significant differences to examine between Stratford and YGT, beyond those already mentioned. The first of these differences is the reason for many of the similarities. YGT was modeled on the Stratford Festival, but the Stratford Festival was not patterned after any preexisting organization, not that there were no successful theatre festivals in the early 1950s. In fact, Tyrone Guthrie had been an instrumental participant in the formation of Scotland's Edinburgh Festival and based some of his advice to the Stratford group on his experiences there.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, no single festival served as a model, as Stratford

⁵⁷ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:40.

⁵⁸ Patterson, *First Stage*, 93.

would serve as a model for YGT.

The important differences in time and place have already been discussed in terms of a Canadian longing for cultural validation, but another very basic difference was in the focus of the two festivals. While Greek and Shakespearean drama are both labeled classic drama, they are, of course, different in many ways. The very structures of the plays are quite distinct. Greek tragedy concentrates on a “frozen moment” in the protagonist’s story, the moment of his greatest *agon* or agony. The moment usually involves the fall of a great man from power due to some personal flaw or *hamartia*. The events that cause the fall and the implications of that fall are explored, not through narrative detail, but through the chorus. The Greek chorus provides exposition and commentary on the events of the play. Chorus members function as equally as observers of the play as they are characters within it.

This structure is quite unlike the structure of Shakespeare’s plays, which are in the form of continuous narrative depictions. Continuous narrative depiction is the storytelling structure most familiar to modern audiences. It is the structure of television situation comedies and Stephen King thrillers. In this structure, there is a causal connection in the events of the story, which unfolds chronologically.⁵⁹

Because modern audiences are much more familiar with the structure of Shakespeare’s plays, they tend to find them more accessible than classic Greek drama. Other factors improve accessibility as well. Fewer centuries separate us from Shakespeare’s work. Shakespeare is taught more in our schools and his works come directly to us in his own words. There is no translation from one language to another required. It is reasonable to conclude that the more accessible a body of work, the better

potential it has to draw an audience. Shakespeare, therefore, is the better draw.

The Greek chorus placed different demands on the composition of the YGT cast. Greater numbers were needed; the YGT company included over seventy members. Stratford had approximately sixty members; however, this number includes “a bevy of Stratford choirboys” and other extras.⁶⁰ The nature of the Greek chorus also required more actors with strong vocal and physical skills, able to chant, sing, and dance.

Costs were much higher for the YGT and this increase goes beyond normal inflationary increases. The company was not only larger, but unions required a higher pay scale, and the season was twice as long. Exact numbers are not available, but it is clear that Stratford had fewer people in paid administrative positions as well. In addition, YGT faced more competition in its first year than Stratford did. The Association of Producing Artists was right next door and the Stratford Festival was less than four hours away.

Ticket sales were significantly weaker for the YGT. Over the course of the season, YGT averaged 665 sales per performance; Stratford averaged 1447. The difference in drawing power between Greek theatre and Shakespeare may well have been a material factor in this disparity. However, another factor may have also played a role. YGT officials admit that very little effort was put into audience development. Lack of experience, time, and money all worked against audience development. In the crush to raise money to bring the festival into existence, the time and money needed to create an

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:5.

interest in the project never materialized. Once the season was under way, there was no money left to promote it beyond the free publicity generated by YGT's positive reviews. On top of that, the low attendance of the initial weeks bred further low attendance because the opportunity for word of mouth promotion was diminished.⁶¹

Ypsilanti did have one advantage over Stratford, the incredibly enthusiastic support of the *Ypsilanti Press*. The *Stratford Beacon-Herald* was strongly opposed to the idea of a Shakespeare festival and published many editorials and letters against the project.⁶² It is difficult to compare the overall quality and quantity of newspaper coverage outside the festivals' hometowns. However, Stratford's coverage may have been superior. Tom Patterson had a large number of personal contacts with Canadian print media through his job as a reporter for *Civic Administration* and he used every opportunity to promote his festival.⁶³ In contrast, YGT's local press representative, Ted Rancont, reported some frustration with inadequate mailing lists and communication, which made publicity more difficult for the YGT.⁶⁴

In Stratford, there was no talk of a permanent building in the first years of the festival. Guthrie had advised against this. "We agreed that to erect a permanent theatre until the Festival was an accomplished success, until it had been proved that there was in fact an audience, would be a wild extravagance."⁶⁵ In Ypsilanti, the first fundraising drive was a building fund drive. When the building proved impracticable, the focus of fundraising shifted, but the change caused some confusion and controversy among

⁶¹ Gousseff interview; Jabbour interview.

⁶² Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:2.

⁶³ Patterson, *First Stage*, 43.

⁶⁴ Ted Rancont, Jr., "1966 Press Department Report," Farres papers.

⁶⁵ Guthrie and Davies *Renown*, 5.

potential festival supporters. YGT included this issue on a list of answers to frequently asked questions and, in 1967, Chamber of Commerce and city officials wondered why the focus of fundraising had changed and what had become of the money raised.⁶⁶

Tyrone Guthrie had also placed a great deal of emphasis on involving as many people of the city of Stratford as possible in the event.

I like very much the feeling . . . that this should really be a community festival – not just a jamboree got up by a few arty types. The performances, in my opinion should be professional to the last degree, but closely integrated in every way we can manage to the widest possible x-section [*sic*] of the community.⁶⁷

Guthrie acted on this feeling in various ways, from the previously mentioned “bevy of Stratford choirboys,” to the two orchestras (one for each production) recruited from the ranks of the local Canadian National Railways Band.⁶⁸ Stratford also relied on more local help for support staff than YGT, which imported a large percentage of its staff from New York City.

The consequence of this was that some members of the Ypsilanti community did begin to regard the Greek Theatre festival as a kind of “jamboree got up by a few arty types.” Local residents who may have otherwise been willing to support the festival were discouraged by the perception that, while their money was certainly wanted, their participation was less than welcome.⁶⁹

The success of any individual festival is dependent upon a wide variety of factors, probably not the least of which is luck. Valid comparisons between festivals are

⁶⁶ “Parlor and Pub;” Minutes of a Meeting Held Prior to the Regular Board of Directors’ Meeting, Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, 4 January 1967, Owens papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶⁷ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:50.

⁶⁹ Anhut interview; Bird interview; Cross interview.

difficult to make due to the number of variables affecting success. Play selection, year of origination, geographic location, number of productions, length of season, and the size and professional status of the company are just a few of these variables. The Stratford Shakespeare Festival provides the best context for the evaluation of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre, yet it is important to remember that there are significant differences between the organizations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was a marvelous failure. YGT organizers succeeded against enormous odds to bring a professional theatre dedicated to a repertory of classic Greek plays into being. The quality of that theatre was praised from Toronto to London to Athens and across the United States. Yet, in spite of all this acclaim, the festival was a financial disaster, which no amount of effort could overcome.

Why did the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre fail? The answer is simple – money. Costs were high; ticket sales were low. The YGT ended its first season nearly half a million dollars in debt.

Nevertheless, the answer is also complicated – because it raises other questions. Did the costs need to be so high? Why were ticket sales so low? Is it that Greek theatre did not have the drawing power to sustain a festival or was the lack of an audience development campaign the culprit? What effect did internal dissension among YGT leadership have on the festival?

When interviewees were asked why they thought the Greek Theatre had failed, they provided a variety of responses. John Mayhew, president of the YGT board, believes it is because he and his fellow board members were, with the exception of James Gousseff, complete amateurs in terms of the theatre. He also agrees with the Breakley report that the fact that board members did not have much money themselves hurt their ability to raise large sums for the theatre.¹

¹ Mayhew interview.

James Gousseff points to two “fatal blows” which killed YGT. The first was low attendance, which he attributes mainly to a lack of proper audience development. Later in the interview, though, Gousseff implied that he believes the drawing power of Greek plays may have had something to do with low attendance as well. Once it became clear that a third play was not financially feasible, he believes the board should have decided to drop *The Birds* and replace it with an “American classic” directed by an American director. Gousseff believes this season would have had more appeal and been easier to market.²

According to Gousseff, the first “fatal blow” of low attendance led to the second blow, which was the decision to remain open by not paying the withholding taxes until the end of the season. Once the season ended, YGT had no money to make up the deficit. After the tax debt was made public, the theatre became a very suspect organization in the eyes of potential donors. In retrospect, it would have been better to close the season early than to incur such a controversial debt.³

Development committee chair, Judy (Riecker) Rumelhart believes that YGT tried to mount a season too soon, before it was adequately prepared. “We were so far ahead of ourselves. In the process of being ahead of ourselves, we made quick choices that weren’t healthy choices You can’t raise money for a deficit. You can only raise money for a project that’s new and fresh and everybody is excited about.” She also blames a lack of local support at the box office.

I don’t think I realized how difficult it would be until after we’d been open for about two weeks. I realized that the local people weren’t attending any of it. Some of them would come and see one play, but we were very deeply dependent on ticket sales that came from outside the State of

² Gousseff interview.

³ Ibid.

Michigan . . . and we just had this really uneasy feeling.⁴

Zeke Jabbour agrees that the YGT was “a year premature.” Not only was YGT not sufficiently funded to go ahead with a 1966 season, but the concept also had not yet been adequately promoted.

No one had ever heard of the Greek Theatre until it was open and it takes time to generate an audience and ultimately before the summer was up they did generate an audience but it was too late. We didn’t come close to sixty-five percent of capacity [YGT’s break-even point for the operating season] . . . until the end. I think that speed was [YGT’s] principal enemy – and money, which is always a problem.⁵

Teddy Farres, who was on the YGT board from the very beginning to the bitter end, also agrees there was “not enough promotion” and that YGT “went too soon.”⁶ However, other interviewees contend that there was a vital momentum to the project, which would have been lost had organizers waited another year.⁷

Chorus member William Cross believes the project was too ambitious for Ypsilanti and that the “bitter” feelings generated by “the sledgehammer kind of brutal tactics of fundraising” hurt YGT’s ability to generate necessary interest within the community.

It was unfortunate. There wasn’t a resonance created in the community . . . It was really hard to get anybody [in Ypsilanti] at that time to accept [the Greek Theatre]. They were looking at all these funny longhaired kids coming into town. Maybe that was it. Maybe because it was *really, really* artsy and had an artsy look to it. I mean [*with an affected accent*], ‘Greek Theatre’ – what is that? This is a blue-collar town.⁸

It is interesting to note that none of the interviewees directly blamed Clara Owens

⁴ Rumelhart interview.

⁵ Jabbour interview.

⁶ Farres interview.

⁷ Mayhew interview; Elwell interview.

⁸ Cross interview.

for the failure of the Greek Theatre, though it is true that several of them believe her hiring of Alexis Solomos in 1965 forced YGT into a 1966 season before the theatre was adequately prepared.⁹ That lack of preparedness resulted in high costs for the fledgling theatre. When Solomos arrived in Ypsilanti, there was no theatre, very little money, and no executive director. YGT did not hire Richard Kirschner until three months before it was to open. What Cecil Clarke of the Stratford Festival accomplished in six months, Kirschner was forced to manage in half the time.¹⁰ Perhaps because of this, Kirschner seems to have overloaded on administrative positions in the theatre. An example, which Clara Owens brought to the board's attention, is the eleven box office positions. Ticket sales never justified such a large staff. The theatre would have been better served to have hired half that number and added employees, if and when demand required. There were complaints (by both Clara Owens and Ted Rancont) of duplication of services in New York as well.

Time constraints drove the costs of talent higher too. There was no time to "shop around" for stars willing to work for YGT for less than the full salary they could demand. The Stratford Festival had been able to find stars willing to do this, though it is important to remember that their situation was unusual. Alec Guinness was a close friend of Tyrone Guthrie's and nearly as keen as he was to try performing Shakespeare on a "new" kind of stage. Moreover, Stratford did not have to contend with Actor's Equity.¹¹ Nevertheless, other theatres that offered actors a chance to perform the classics had been able to secure their services at a discount. YGT had a model for this right next door, with

⁹ Farres interview; Gousseff interview; Jabbour interview; Rumelhart interview.

¹⁰ Pettigrew and Portman, *Stratford*, 1:44.

¹¹ Patterson, *First Stage*, 92.

the Association of Producing Artists at the University of Michigan.¹²

Costs were also increased by the speed with which the stadium needed to be converted. The final decision on which site to use was not made until March 1966 and then construction was further delayed by Eastern Michigan University's unwillingness to relinquish the stadium until after the baseball season. Consequently, labor costs skyrocketed with overtime pay and contracts and supplies had to be purchased without a search for lowest bidder.

When the expenses of YGT's initial season are compared with those of the Great Lakes Theatre Festival, the difference is impressive. The GLSF was started just four years before the Greek Theatre and, like YGT, it was an Equity company from its inception. Unlike YGT, it incurred no costs in adapting its physical plant and made no effort to lure big name stars into the company, a company that could be significantly smaller than YGT's because it had no Greek chorus to cast. The contrast in expenses is still startling despite these advantages. YGT's initial season cost more than fifteen times GLSF's. All but one of the successful festivals examined in this study began modestly and grew gradually into fully produced professional theatre organizations. YGT may have made a mistake in modeling itself after the one exception to this generalization, the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare Festival.

Clara Owens charged that YGT's costs were high due to mismanagement by the board and malfeasance on the part of Richard Kirschner. There may be some truth to the charges the board abdicated its oversight responsibilities and that Kirschner was guilty of overspending. The YGT board was reacting to situations rather than planning for them and Kirschner appears to have made little effort at cost cutting. Owens failed to

¹² Jabbour interview.

acknowledge, however, that the YGT board and Kirschner had few other options due to the speed with which the festival had to be mounted. Moreover, the rush was created in large part by her insistence that Alexis Solomos be hired in 1965.

YGT may have been able to overcome these high production costs if ticket sales had not been so low. Nearly 50,000 people saw the 94 performances, but that number represented only 35% of the stadium-theatre's capacity. The *Ypsilanti Press* often addressed the issue of Greek theatre's drawing power in its editorials supporting the YGT.

As we commented in editorials during the [fundraising] drive and in the past, no one is really sure just how well Greek drama will draw We know the idea has achieved national and international recognition, even as a dream. As a reality we believe it will take its place as one of the major cultural revolutions in an exploding national cultural revival.¹³

As the 1966 season ended, and the "exploding national cultural revival" failed to materialize, the *Press* examined YGT's inability to attract a large audience.

That the theatre even drew enough patrons to keep going this first year is remarkable. The first phase of a national [fundraising] campaign never got off the ground. The promotion of advance ticket sales, considered a necessity for any repertory theatre, was months late in getting started because of the crisis nature of the season's birth. And, the American theatre public has simply not been brought up on Greek drama in the same way it has been exposed to Shakespeare and Shaw.¹⁴

The *Press* concluded, and rightly so, that both lack of audience development and the nature of the product itself had an influence on YGT's ticket sales. It is interesting to note, however, that Greek theatre is drawing audiences in the late 1990s. A March 1999 article in *American Theatre* counted eight professional productions of Greek tragedies (or

¹³ "Theatre Drive Magnificent Achievement by Community," editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 23 March 1966.

¹⁴ "Greek Theatre to Close Season of Artistic Acclaim," editorial, *Ypsilanti Press*, 2 September 1966.

adaptations of Greek tragedies) in the United States in a nine-month period. That number included a production of *Electra*, which was so highly acclaimed and popular, that it traveled from London to the McCarter Theatre at Princeton and from there, “rhapsodic reviews led to a November Broadway transfer.” Toby Zinman, the author of the article, considers the popularity of the Greek plays remarkable for an American audience that “is generally allergic to the ancient, the tragic and the high-and-mighty.” He attributes the surge to a “millennial angst” and an interest in what the plays have to say about women’s roles in society.¹⁵ Be that as it may, it is clear that professional productions of these plays can interest American audiences, but that the interest is much higher today than it was in 1966.

Faced with high costs and low ticket sales, YGT leaders looked for donations, first to keep the season alive, and then to retire its debts. They were unable to raise the necessary funds and this is due in part to Clara Owens. It is impossible to measure the damage she did with her public and private campaign against the theatre but there must have been negative repercussions. The alarming letters to the donor list, the private meetings in her home, and negative statements to the press all hurt YGT’s ability to generate confidence in its leadership and diminished its capacity to raise funds for the organization.

That said, it must also be remembered that, without Clara Owens, the Greek Theatre would never have been born. Her persistent dedication to the concept enabled her to bring the theatre to life. It also prevented her from being able to let others control it when it got too big for her to manage on her own. When she felt that control slipping,

¹⁵ Toby Zinman, “Still Dangerous After All These Years,” *American Theatre*, March 1999.

she became angry to the point of irrationality. Medea-like, she destroyed her own child.

In retrospect, there is much that could have been done differently that would have improved YGT's chances for success. If Eastern Michigan University had been involved sooner and to a greater degree, money could have been saved and the project would have had more legitimacy within the community at an earlier date. Several successful theatre festivals can attribute at least part of their success to an affiliation with a college or university (See Table 5).

YGT's relationship with the citizens of Ypsilanti could have been improved. There will always be skeptics and nay-sayers in any community against any large unproven endeavor, but Clara Owens' over protectiveness of her "baby" alienated groups and individuals who could well have been helpful to YGT.

The efforts and expenditures towards a permanent theatre building turned out to be a colossal waste of time, money, and community goodwill that would have been better directed towards organizing the first season. It would have been better to wait on a building (as Tyrone Guthrie advised Stratford Festival organizers to do) until YGT had proven that a festival could succeed.

Some compromises could have been made on the production elements of the first season to save money. Yes, YGT needed big-name stars to attract the same kind of press attention that Stratford did in its first season, but it is unfortunate that Alexis Solomos and Richard Kirschner were unable to locate stars willing to come for less money than Dame Judith and Bert Lahr. Audiences seldom attend a production because a famous scene designer designs it; a less established designer than Eldon Elder could have been hired in that first year. An American cutter and draper could have executed Solomos' costume

designs. Gilbert Hemsley could have lit that stage quite well without five tons of lighting equipment. Recorded music would have saved a large amount of money. If live music was deemed a necessity, money could have been saved by hiring a less prestigious composer and conductor. It could be argued that each of these changes would have compromised the quality of the final product to some degree. While that is probably true, the costs versus the benefits of all these added expenses may not have been justified in a first year festival. With the exception of Stratford and YGT, all the festivals examined in this study made significant concessions in production values to budget restraints. That the Stratford Festival succeeded without doing so would seem to be an exception on the path to a flourishing festival, rather than a rule.

The largest misstep of all for the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was the failure to pay withholding taxes on its payroll. Once the tax debt became public, it served as a confirmation, whether justified or not, of Clara Owens' charges of mismanagement by Richard Kirschner and the YGT board. There is, of course, no way to know if the theatre could have survived early closure well enough to produce a second season. Nevertheless, it was impossible to muster any kind of significant corporate or foundation support for the organization once it was under a federal tax lien.

What, then, was the impact of this magnificent failure known as the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre? It was billed as a potential economic boon to city businesses. In some respects it was. Ypsilanti restaurants, hotels, service stations, and clothing stores all reported noticeable increases in business during the twelve week season. The Huron Motor Inn, run by sometime YGT board member William Anhut, reported the largest increase – nearly seventy percent. Most of the other businesses reported increases

ranging from ten to thirty-five percent.¹⁶

Nevertheless, other local merchants could not have been pleased with YGT's impact on their businesses. By the end of the 1966, YGT owed well over one-hundred area businesses various amounts of money ranging from under \$10 to over \$70,000. Some of the smaller accounts payable were paid off, but many other businesses received only partial or no payment for goods and services rendered to YGT. Fortunately, there is no evidence that anyone was forced out of business due to YGT's debts.

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre's impact on Michigan and American theatre has not been profound. The failure of YGT may have prevented any other efforts to establish a professional theatre festival in Ypsilanti. No one has attempted such a thing in the city since 1966.

When organizers were considering an Ann Arbor Summer Festival to include professional theatre and other performing arts in early 1979, they were mindful of YGT's experiences. James Packard, director of program development and publications at the University of Michigan School of Engineering, proposed the Ann Arbor Festival, which had a twelve member board of directors appointed jointly by the University of Michigan Regents and the Ann Arbor City Council. Packard told an *Ann Arbor News* reporter that he had gone to see *The Birds* three times. He called YGT's demise "tragic" and "a case of an artistic coup betrayed by physical facility because the remodeled stadium just couldn't deliver the theatrical values." The *Ann Arbor News* article went on at great length about the lessons that YGT had learned that could help an Ann Arbor Festival and concluded that "sound management, financial stability, active participation of the

¹⁶ "Merchants Reap Bonus from 1st Theatre Season," *Ypsilanti Press*, 3 September 1966.

University of Michigan, good planning and an attractive repertoire” were vital to the new festival’s success.¹⁷ The Ann Arbor Summer Festival is still in operation today, though its focus has changed over the years, and theatre has become only a very minor element within the current festival concept.

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre drew the attention of the national theatre scene for only one season. For the most part, the attention was favorable, but when it failed to produce a second season, its impact on American theatre became negligible. Call it “one brief shining moment” or a flash-in-the-pan, the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre was significant while it lasted, but it did not survive long enough to be of lasting significance.

Nevertheless, an understanding of the triumphs and failures of YGT could very well be valuable to scholars interested in the history of American regional theatre and the summer festival movement. Further investigation of festivals founded since 1966 would also be worthwhile. The Great Lakes area offers numerous festivals and would be ideal for a regional study. In addition, expansion of the comparative analysis of theatre festivals begun in this study would not only add to our understanding of the history of those festivals but would also help identify the elements required for creating more viable theatre festivals in the future.

Several YGT interviewees expressed hope that someone would try again someday to produce a professional theatre festival dedicated to Greek drama. Zeke Jabbour spoke of wanting to record and save the history of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.

I think this deserves to be preserved as some part of theatre history because, hopefully, someday somebody will do it again. Maybe it will succeed. There ought to be a theatre – an English-speaking theatre – devoted to Greek drama, because that’s where it all started.¹⁸

¹⁷ Chong W. Penn, “A Theater Rises, Falls,” *Ann Arbor News*, 11 February 1979.

¹⁸ Jabbour interview.

Could such a theatre be sustained? The recent spate of Greek revivals provides some hope that it could. In November 1976, Clara Owens told a reporter she was not sorry that she had tried to bring that theatre to life. "Perhaps some day, someone will try again It would give tremendous delight and satisfaction to thousands of people. Good luck to that someone."¹⁹

¹⁹ Chong W. Penn, "Greek Theatre . . . A Dream?" *Ann Arbor News*, 21 November 1976.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PROGRAM INFORMATION

The Ypsilanti Greek Theatre

Artistic Director	Alexis Solomos
Executive Director	Richard Kirschner

Aeschylus'

The Oresteia

Translated by Richard Lattimore

Entire Production Conceived and Directed by Alexis Solomos

Scenery	Eldon Elder
Costumes	Alexis Solomos
Lighting	Gilbert V. Hemsley, Jr.
Music	Iannis Xenakis
Choreography	Helen McGehee
Musical Direction	Konstantin Simonovic
Festival Stage	Eldon Elder

Cast of *The Oresteia*
(in order of appearance)

Part I – *Agamemnon*

The Watchman
Chorus of Elders

Lloyd Harris
David Thompson, Gene Nye,
David Marlatt, David-Rhys Anderson,
Paul Bengston, Michael Harrah,
Richard Esckilsen, John Buck, Jr.,
Nelson Phillips, Leonard Peters,
Peter Shebaya, Dan Leach, William Cross,
Jeff Delson, Phillip Piro, David Zirlin
Judith Anderson
Richard Mangoode
Donald Davis
Ruby Dee
Frederic Warriner

Clytemnestra
The Herald
Agamemnon
Cassandra
Aegisthus

Part II – *The Libation Bearers*

Orestes
Pylades
Chorus of Slave Women

John Michael King
John Buck, Jr.
Jacqueline Brookes, Dina Paisner,
Tamara Daniel, Julia de Lacy,
Connie Barron, Marilyn Black,
Margaret Cicierska, Anna Carparelli,
Alice Condidina, Martha Craven,
Jeanette Dabish, Diane Grey, Loi Leabo,
Tonia Shimin, Cinda Siler, Joan Tyson
Karen Ludwig
Donald Marlatt (June and September),
David-Rhys Anderson (July),
David Thompson (August)
Judith Anderson
Ruth Volner
Frederic Warriner

Electra
The Manservant

Clytemnestra
The Nurse
Aegisthus

Part III – *The Eumenides*

The Priestess of Apollo
Apollo
Orestes
Hermes
Ghost of Clytemnestra
Chorus of Furies

Dina Paisner
Donald Davis
John Michael King
Jeff Delson
Judith Anderson
Tamara Daniel, Anna Carparelli,
Marilyn Black, Karen Ludwig,
Connie Barron, Margaret Cicierska,
Alice Condidina, Martha Craven,
Jeanette Dabish, Diane Grey, Loi Leabo,
Cinda Siler, Tonia Shimin, Joan Tyson,
Julia de Lacy, Melissa Foster
Jacqueline Brookes
Richard Ball, Ken Brown, Don C. DiLella,
Harry Dittenbar, Frank Helle,
James C. McCullough, Michael A. Moore,
Ira Neil Shor, Chuck Webster,
Richard P. Worswick

Athene
Twelve Athenian Jurors

Aristophanes'

The Birds

Translated by William Arrowsmith

Entire Production Conceived and Directed by Alexis Solomos

Scenery and Costumes

Eldon Elder

Lighting

Gilbert V. Hemsley, Jr.

Music

Herman Chessid

Choreography

Gemze De Lappe

Orchestration and Dance Music

John Carisi

Musical Director

Konstantin Simonovic

Festival Stage

Eldon Elder

Cast of *The Birds*
(in order of appearance)

Euelipides	Jack Fletcher
Pisthetairos	Bert Lahr
Sandpiper	Michael Harrah
Hoopoe	Donald Davis
Flamingo	Tamara Daniel
Persian Bird	David Zirlin
Little Hoopoe	William Herter
Guzzle-guzzle	Lloyd Harris
Chorus	Connie Baron, Paul Bengston, Marilyn Black, John Buck, Jr., Anna Carparelli, Margaret Cicierska, Alice Condidina, William Cross, Jeff Delson, Richard Eस्कilsen, Diane Grey, Michael Harrah, Loi Leabo, Don Leach, Karen Ludwig, Richard Mangoode, Gene Nye, Tonia Shimin, Cinda Siler, Joan Tyson
Nightingale	Melissa Foster
Messenger Bird	Gene Nye
Priest	Nelson Phillips
Poet	Phillip Piro
Prophet	Peter Shebaya
Meton	David Thompson
Inspector	Donald Martlatt
Legislator	David-Rhys Anderson
Sentry	Richard Eस्कilsen
Iris	Ruby Dee
Herald from Earth	David Zirlin
Town-Crier Bird	Lloyd Harris
Town-Crier's Assistant	Julia de Lacy
Delinquent	William Herter
Kinesias	Phillip Piro
Informer	Ruth Volner
Prometheus	Peter Shebaya
Poseidon	Frederic Warriner
Herakles	Nelson Phillips
Triballos	William Herter

APPENDIX B

PROPOSAL FOR A GRADUATE PROGRAM IN DRAMATIC ARTS AT EMU

The Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts at Eastern Michigan University is seeking to establish a graduate program in Dramatic Arts in conjunction with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. This program would be similar in many respects to that undertaken by the University of Minnesota in conjunction with [the] Tyrone Guthrie Theatre of Minneapolis.

Under such a program, especially talented and academically qualified students in all of the various areas of theatre art would pursue a carefully balanced course of academic studies at the university and in addition engage in some form of creative internship at the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre.

The program of study favored by the department would terminate in the degree of Master of Fine Arts, a degree reserved for advanced students of the theatre arts who have attained not only a firm background in the history, theory, and literature of the theatre, but who have in addition, demonstrated mastery of the arts and crafts of theatrical production.

Graduate study in this program would serve students seeking further mastery of the Dramatic Arts prior to advanced graduate study, to embarkation upon teaching careers at all levels or – in exceptional cases – to entrance into the theatrical professions. The program would be designated primarily for resident students with a careful rotation of courses to provide for the occasional commuter.

It is estimated by the department that the potential for national attention among theatre educators and students alike inherent in the conception of the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre would provide a climate most favorable to obtaining students for such a program. It is further believed that an aggressive campaign could in fact, obtain foundation support in the form of graduate fellowships similar to those now being provided by the McKnight Foundation to a considerable number of the students in Minnesota's program. It is hoped that a sufficient number of fellows could be endowed to guarantee the establishment of such a graduate program at Eastern.

Tentative Program
For The
Degree Of Master Of Fine Arts In Dramatic Arts

Admission to the Program:

Students with distinguished undergraduate records in Dramatic Arts making application to the Graduate School will be admitted to the program upon recommendation of the graduate committee of the Department of Speech and Dramatic arts. Each student will be assigned an advisor to consult on the planning of his first semester's program.

Admission to Candidacy:

Upon completion of twelve (12) semester hours of departmental graduate courses, the graduate committee of the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts will admit to candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts those students who have successfully demonstrated their ability to further pursue graduate study. Upon admission to candidacy the student will select a chairman and request the appointment of the two additional members of his committee.

Course of Study:

With the advice of his chairman and the approval of his committee, each degree candidate will establish a course of study pursuant to the following limitations:

Minimum total semester hours of acceptable graduate credit: 48

Specific Limitations:

1. A minimum of six (6) hours of graduate study will be taken in approved extra-departmental courses.
2. A minimum of six (6) hours of graduate study will be taken in approved departmental courses – always including Introduction to Research – other than those devoted to the dramatic arts. (This would include courses in speech science, radio, and television, interpretation, and public address.)
3. A minimum of two (2) hours will be taken in an approved departmental seminar covering in considerable breadth the literature of one of the creative or scholarly areas of the dramatic arts plus requiring a major individual research paper exploring some relatively narrow topic in considerable depth.
4. A maximum of six (6) hours of graduate credit may be allowed for work on the final project. (See below.)
5. A maximum of twelve (12) hours of graduate credit – no more than eight (8) in any given semester – may be allowed for work on a creative internship program conducted in conjunction with the Ypsilanti Greek Theatre. (Graduate

credit for internship work will be granted to degree candidates only.)

Balance of the Program

The remaining hours will be elected from courses in dramatic arts to first fulfill and then supplement the following minimum requirements:

- A. The student's cumulative undergraduate and graduate record must include evidence of the successful completion of a minimum of one course in each of the following creative areas of study in the dramatic arts plus a second course in a minimum of four of them:
 - 1. Acting
 - 2. Directing and theatre management
 - 3. Stagecraft and lighting
 - 4. Costume and make-up
 - 5. Scene design and theatre planning
 - 6. Children's theatre
- B. Similarly, the student's cumulative undergraduate and graduate record must include evidence of the successful completion of two graduate or undergraduate courses in each of the following scholarly areas of study in the dramatic arts:
 - 1. Theatre history
 - 2. Dramatic writing, theory and criticism
 - 3. Dramatic literature

In the event that the student has had no prior course work in any of these creative and scholarly areas of study, he must take one of the department's introductory courses for which he has satisfactory prerequisites. If the introductory course demanded is offered by this department only at such a fundamental level that it carries a course number lower than 300, the student will receive no credit toward a graduate degree for the successful completion of that course, but must consider its completion as eliminating an entering deficiency.

Qualifying Examinations

As he nears completion of his program of study, each candidate with the advice of his chairman and the approval of his committee will present himself for examination during the semester of his choice. The qualifying examination will consist of three separate two-hour examinations. Each candidate will elect the three areas over which he is to be examined from the following:

- 1. *Scholarly areas.* The student may elect to be examined over at least one but not more than two of these:
 - a. Theatre history
 - b. Dramatic writing, theory and criticism

- c. Dramatic literature
- 2. *Creative areas.* The student may elect to be examined over at least one but not more than two of these:
 - a. Acting and directing
 - b. Children's theatre
 - c. Design and technical production

An average grade of B on the three separate examinations is required for qualification. A grade lower than C on any single examination will require an immediate oral examination to be passed satisfactorily before the student may be qualified. A student who fails the qualifying examination may be completely re-examined once in some subsequent semester.

Final Project:

Each candidate will complete satisfactorily a project demonstrating his mastery over the scholarship or the creativity of one of the areas of dramatic arts. The project may consist of the research and writing of a formal thesis, or the successful completion of a major creative project in connection with one or more of the departmental productions. A maximum of six (6) hours of credit may be allowed for project work.

APPENDIX C

YGT RESPONSE TO CLAN CRAWFORD, JR. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How much money has been paid out by the corporation for all purposes since September 1, 1965?

Ans. \$489,691.38

- 1a. Please give the date to which expenditures were counted. This should be no earlier than July 1, 1966. Please use the same period for answering all of the questions which follow.

Ans. Accounting date used – June 30, 1966

- 1b. How much of the amount stated in answer to question 1 was paid out for each of the following purposes:

1. Construction of temporary theatre	\$ 41,837.36
2. Renovation of library	122.00
3. Repayment of borrowings	25,750.00
4. Production operating expenses	62,677.74
5. Production fees	35,065.82
6. Rehearsal expenses	104,986.03
7. Physical production	78,818.03
8. Miscellaneous production	6,803.48
9. Publicity and advertising	40,810.74
10. Administrative	61,379.55
11. Theatre expenses	11,210.13

- 1c. Is there a duplication in the answers to question 1b? Please explain.

Ans. The figure of \$62,777.74 for theatre expenses is duplicated throughout the other categories. This figure represents the expenditures for the operating period between June 14 through June 30. The accounting system is on a monthly cycle.

- 1d. Please state the total amount of any sums paid out which are not shown in answer to questions 1b and 1c and give the general purpose thereof, but show the nature and amount of any kind of expenditure amounting to \$10,000 or more.

Ans. The total amount of sums expended above the categories listed is \$82,908.24. This represents the following:

- a. Performance bonds – Actors Equity, \$38,610.00*
- b. Consulting and fund raising fees, \$22,738.55*
- c. Deposits with various unions such as Local 829, Scenic Artists I.A.T.S.E.*
- d. Deposit with Eastern Michigan University*
- e. Equipment for office, prop shop, costume shop, box office*
- f. Payment of withholding tax and Social Security taxes through April 30. May and June are incorporated within expenses requested.*
- g. Sundry items such as unamortized architects [sic] fees, etc.*
- h. No other items are in the \$10,000 and above category*

2. For each of the categories listed in questions 1 through 1d, please show the additional amount which management anticipates will be paid out through August 31, 1966.

<i>Ans.</i>	<u><i>Accounts Payable</i></u>
<i>1. Construction of temporary theatre</i>	<i>\$ 3,838.49</i>
<i>2. Renovation of library</i>	<i>2,891.03</i>
<i>3. Repayment of borrowing</i>	<i>none</i>
<i>4. Production operating expenses (\$38,000 @ 9.4 weeks)</i>	<i>357,200.00</i>
<i>5. Production fees</i>	<i>1,424.36</i>
<i>6. Rehearsal expenses</i>	<i>2,700.88</i>
<i>7. Physical production</i>	<i>5,212.51</i>
<i>8. Miscellaneous production</i>	<i>4,354.31</i>
<i>9. Administrative</i>	<i>3,815.85</i>
<i>10. Publicity and advertising</i>	<i>31,855.25</i>
<i>11. Theatre expense</i>	<i>1,405.31</i>

- 2a. Do you anticipate any expenditures not listed above through August 31, 1966? If so please give the amount and itemize any categories amounting to \$5,000 or more.

Ans. \$4,040.59

Federal taxes for June of \$22,977.73 to be paid by July 31. Deposits are made every performance day to tax account for this purpose. These taxes are incorporated within No. 4 category – Production Operating Expenses.

3. Of the total previous and anticipated expenditures shown by the answers to questions 1 and 2, how much, to date, has been authorized by the Board of Directors?

Ans. The total amount was approved at a meeting on May 18 by the Board of Directors.

4. Please give the dates of all meetings and resolutions of the Board of Directors, where the expenditure of funds was authorized and the amount of the expenditures authorized on each date.

Ans. The budget of \$434,634.00 was approved on May 18, 1966.

5. Please describe the measures which have been taken to control the expenditures of funds and prevent unauthorized expenditures, giving the names of persons responsible for carrying out such measures.

Ans. Richard Kirschner alone signs all checks up to \$1,000. All checks over \$1,000 must be signed by any two of the following three: Mr. Kirschner, Thomas Kentes, and/or Fred Shaefer. Any expenditures above the budget must also be approved by the Board of Directors.

6. Please list the receipts of the corporation from September 1, 1965 to June 30, 1966, in the following categories:

<i>Ans.</i>	<i>Contributions</i>	<i>\$ 178,556.94</i>
	<i>Ticket Sales</i>	<i>54,491.99</i>
	<i>Borrowings</i>	<i>256,300.00</i>
	<i>Other</i>	<i>16,544.00</i>
	<i>Concessions</i>	<i>1,844.40</i>

- 6a. With respect to the above categories, please list any sources of income included therein which amount to \$10,000 or more stating the amount of each.

Ans. None

7. Please state the total indebtedness of the corporation on the date on which expenditures are reported in answer to question 1, and to [sic] give the names of creditors owed \$10,000 or more and the amount owing each.

<i>Ans.</i>	<i>\$ 313,149.00</i>
<i>Federal Taxes</i>	<i>22,977.73</i>
<i>Jabbour Construction Co. (Estim.)</i>	<i><u>70,000.00</u></i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$406,146.73</i>

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