# The best of all possible 'Candides'

By Hal Prince

## How one of Broadway's noblest failures became one of its noblest successes

I FIRST heard of the Chelsea about 10 years ago when Anthony Perkins asked me to lend my name to the advisory board for a new theatre group working out of a church in the Chelsea area of New York. I agreed, and forgot about it.

Years later I was in Brooklyn to see the Chelsea Theatre Center's impressive production of Edward Bond's *Saved*. After the performance Bob Kalfin, the artistic director of the company, introduced himself to me and pointed out that I was a member of their advisory board. Subsequently, I made a number of return visits to the Chelsea and the work was always superior.

Kalfin called me one day to ask whether I would be interested in working with them, and I said I would indeed. He suggested a revival of the Bernstein-Hellman-Wilbur-Latouche-Voltaire *Candide,* which had been done in 1956 on Broadway.

I told him I didn't think a revival would work. I had seen the original and it was ponderous and a bore, and I remembered it well. The score was exciting, but the performance confusing. I tend to think the production failed at the top from that confusion. Half the show was politically and socially oriented and the other half was oriented to the satirization of musical operetta, Bernstein's musical-theatre joke.

I think it's unfair to say, as some people have, that the book was the villain. Tyrone Guthrie takes second place to no one in recent theatre history, but he made his mistakes and *Candide* was one of them. The book, music, lyrics, and physical production were inappropriate to one another.

About six months later Kalfin called again and said he had a young man working on it, reshaping Hellman's original material. I read it, didn't think it accomplished much, and forgot about *Candide* again.

Three months later *A Little Night Music* was open, and I was looking for something to do for the 1973-74 season. Obviously, I couldn't get a new musical ready, and I began to think about *Candide.*

The first thing I did was read Voltaire. I had never read *Candide*. I was surprised by how light and impulsive and irreverent and *unimportant* it is. Apparently he wrote it quickly and denied having written it, putting it down as a schoolboy's prank. And that's the spirit of it.

The 300 and some odd years that separated Voltaire's writing it and the Guthrie version of it had served only to make a classic of it, and spoil the fun.

Our version would have to be as outrageous in contemporary terms and, curiously, as naive.

I started to think about the structure of it, and the problem that telling a picaresque story with an infinite number of highs and lows and no real crises presents in the theatre.

It becomes boring. The hero, beginning his odyssey, runs into negative forces and overcomes them or subverts them, and then runs into more negative forces and more negative forces, and then, after a while, a pattern is achieved and the audience loses interest.

Therefore, it must be a short evening. Anything that followed an intermission would seem to reprise the first act. Arbitrarily, I decided an hour and 45 minutes was the proper length for the show. And when it went into rehearsal, it ran an hour and 45 minutes. (Today it runs an hour and 57 minutes—with laughs.)

I have talked about using a painting, a piece of sculpture, something visual to synthesize a play for me. What was *Candide*? A cartoon, of course, but that came later. More specifically, how to illustrate a picaresque story in static terms? A triptych. But how do you animate a triptych?

I thought immediately of a side show at the circus, a series of elevated platforms, in one, the Fat Lady, in others the Sword Swallower, the Tattooed Man, the

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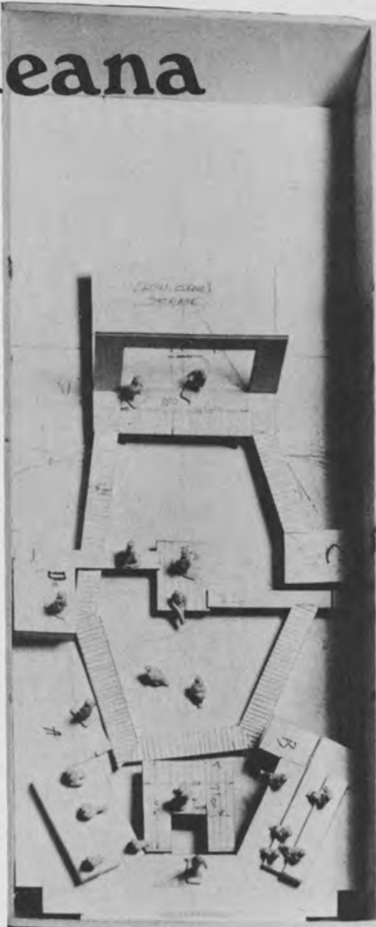
# Candideana

Photographs
by Martha Swope,
Friedman-Abeles

Costume sketches
by Franne Lee

Design in shoebox
by Eugene Lee



LITTLE RED
RIDING HOOD
RUNNING AWAY
AFTER LISBON
UNITED SCENIC ARTISTS
LOCAL 829
AFL-CIO
C.D.-141
COSTUME DESIGNER
SIGNATURE

TOP
UNITED SCENIC ARTISTS
LOCAL 829
AFL-CIO
C.D.-141
COSTUME DESIGNER
SIGNATURE
PAQUETTE

Bearded Woman, the Siamese Twins, and so on.

Supposing you were guided by the barker (Voltaire?) on foot from one booth to the other along the route of Candide's odyssey. The booths would have little curtains and behind one there would be Lisbon in the throes of a child's-eye version of an earthquake. Another booth would contain war, another a gambling casino in Venice. The booths would be of different sizes, as they are in the circus, and the painting would be primitive, garish, indicating events, leaving the better part of detail to the imagination; the less specific, the more participation from the bystanders.

Once I had gone that far, I realized even *it* was schematic and would defeat an hour-and-45-minute piece. Nevertheless, some version of it would work.

I called Kalfin and told him what was on my mind. He liked it. I suggested we approach Lillian Hellman and ask her whether she would be willing to write a new *Candide*. I told her our scheme and she said that was what she had always wanted, but *Candide*? Never again! In that case, would she object to my asking someone else to work with me? Immediately, she agreed. (When subsequently I put it to Bernstein and Wilbur and they agreed, I figured all of them wanted to lay *Candide* to rest once and for all.) The only proviso she made was that none of her original dialogue be retained in the new version.

I then called Hugh Wheeler. We met and listened to the album. Each of us took the Voltaire and underlined choice bits, going over what particularly delighted us. He went away to write it *before* the lawyers and agents had met and contracts had been negotiated.

That was a complicated business from the Chelsea's point of view because the original not only had Bernstein as composer and Hellman as author, but Wilbur, Latouche, Hellman, Bernstein, and Dorothy Parker as lyricists.

Hugh and I paid Bernstein a visit and told him our plan (he said it was what he had always wanted) and discussed new numbers—in particular an opening. I did not want to open with "The Best of All Possible Worlds" because it is a statement of philosophy, the idea rather than an introduction of the characters, the emotion. The original version was cerebral, keeping the audience at arm's length. Ours must be visceral, must envelop the audience.

Once again we had a show that needed an opening number to tell the audience who its main characters are and set the style.

## The only proviso Hellman made was that none of her orginal dialogue be retained

Next, Hugh rejected Venice, rejected Paris (and along with them, some of our favorite numbers, "What's the Use?" and the Paris "Mazurka." Ultimately, we did use the theme of the "Mazurka," but the show never visited Paris). We were going to use episodes from Voltaire that hadn't taken place in the original musical—Constantinople for one.

Bernstein produced a file of melodies, themes, full songs in some instances, of discarded material from 1955-56. There was enough musical material to accommodate the new version, but who was to write the new lyrics? Lenny had, in fact, written "I Am Easily Assimilated" in its entirety, and the "Auto da Fé" with John Latouche, which though discarded in 1956 became valuable to us. But he was scheduled for a series of lectures at Harvard. Given the short time we had to work, it seemed expeditious to ask Steve Sondheim to help us out since I had never met Richard Wilbur.

Wheeler finished a first draft in two weeks. Although not the rehearsal version, it was hilarious.

Chelsea arranged interviews with designers, among them Eugene Lee. I had seen his environmental set for LeRoi Jones's *Slave Ship* at the Chelsea some seasons earlier. More recently, he had been working with Peter Brook. I went through the whole trajectory of my thinking process, arriving at the side show scheme, voicing concern about the schematicness of it. Immediately he suggested limiting curtains to some stages and varying the levels as well as the sizes of them. This suggested to me the possibility of playing scenes simultaneously on stages in opposite ends of the theatre. For the first time I remembered the extraordinary Italian production of *Orlando Furioso*, which I had seen in Bryant Park in 1970 and which clearly hovered somewhere in my subconscious.

I had a thought about "Glitter and Be Gay," Cunégonde's aria: there would be a pianist, the real thing, in eighteenth-century French dress, white-powdered wig, big bosom with beauty mark, her wig emblazoned with diamonds, appearing from a sort of trap door concealed in one of the stages. (Lee loved that.) During the song Cunégonde would denude the powdered wig of its diamonds, covering herself with them.

So a trap door had entered the conversation and we began breaking the side show pattern. Had I any objections to people *sitting* in places other than the center of the environment? Sitting? Well, you can hardly expect them to stand for two hours. Hardly. I had no objection. How about all over the set? Did I object to that? No objection.

Lee and his wife, Franne, live on a sailboat off Providence, R.I., and he went home to work. In about a month he was back with drawings, elevations. I told him I can't read drawings, he would have to construct a model for me. He returned with a shoebox, inside which was a model for *Candide* as it would look in the Chelsea.

We were going to use a ballroom at the Brooklyn Academy of Music that Harvey Lichtenstein had converted into a theatre. It would have held 500 people. It was long and narrow, high ceilinged, and had a balcony about 15 to 18 feet up. Most of the thinking I did was based on that room. Soon after, I learned that Peter Brook had preempted it and we were switching to the Chelsea's regular theatre, which seats 180 people.

At this point Pat Birch asked me what my plans were for the following season. I told her about Brooklyn and that I assumed with all her offers to choreograph on Broadway (it seemed to me she'd been offered everything the following season), she wouldn't be interested. On the contrary, Brooklyn was going to be fun, and she wanted to be there.

From mid-April I started to walk around with my shoebox. I took my shoebox to Europe, I looked at my shoebox on the mantelpiece in Spain all summer, and I returned to New York in the fall with my shoebox.

As rehearsals approached, Lee asked me what my adjustment to the shoebox was. Did I think of it as a small one or a big one? I realized that I was looking at it and seeing the Broadhurst Theatre, and he was looking at it and seeing the Chelsea, fourth floor of the Brooklyn Academy. I am jumping ahead, but in September, when I went to Brooklyn to see the space without seats in it, I went into shock.

Later, when we decided to bring *Candide* to Broadway, I had no worries about the adjustment from the Chelsea to the Broadway Theatre. If there was one thing that bothered me about the production in Brooklyn, it was that there were too few people watching it. The relationship of the people with the people, the audience with the audience, is what makes

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*Candide* exceptional. The relationship of audience with actor is fairly standard.

People are self-conscious about responding when they're alone, and 180 people in the Chelsea were, except in a few areas, very much alone. If they wanted to laugh, they were aware that they might just be laughing by themselves. In Brooklyn we found that sometimes we had celebrations with our audiences, but more often we had silence. Smiling, grinning, nudging each other, but self-consciously editing audibility out of their responses.

Of course, there's a certain amount of the Richard Schechner Performing Garage business of people coming near you and touching you, but that's kept to a minimum.

I have my own problems with this. As a member of the audience I don't really enjoy actors mauling me, kissing me, hugging me, or grabbing me.

I remember that when I saw *The Blacks* at the Negro Ensemble Company, I was sitting in the front row, and they put a crown in my lap. Later on, Roscoe Lee Browne ordered me to bring the crown back to the center of the stage. I was appalled that I had to rise and move into the play. The response at least was intended.

Not so when I went to see Grotowski. I was hit in the leg with a loaf of bread. That did little to draw me into the experience. Predictably, it alienated me.

So in the case of *Candide,* I instructed the actors, who are never more than a foot away from some of the audience, to be extremely polite, mindful of their intrusion on the audience's privacy. I instructed them to say "Please" when they wanted something and "Excuse me" and "Pardon me" when they were crossing in front of someone. That "Excuse me" was mentioned in almost every review.

The original shoebox contained seven playing areas and during the course of the next six months, before we went into rehearsal, we shuffled those areas, particularly the entrances and exits, the number of trap doors, stairways; but the final set retained seven stages, two of which are proscenium, a connecting ramp, and two bridges.

Bernstein suggested we reorchestrate the show for everything from one to 13 instruments, with the emphasis on smaller groups. Obviously, I left all that to him and Hershy Kay, who had originally orchestrated *Candide* and was eager to do a totally different shoestring version of it, and the musical director, John Mauceri.

Mauceri, regular conductor of the Yale Symphony, had conducted Bernstein's *Mass* in Vienna. He was in the process of

## Bernstein suggested we reorchestrate, with the emphasis on smaller groups

signing as an assistant to Pierre Boulez at the New York Philharmonic.

So Bernstein, Kay, and Mauceri designed what has now been called a quadraphonic concept, simply: 13 musicians parceled out in four separate areas of the theatre and surrounding the audience.

I wanted, before I left for my summer in Europe, to have the costume designs in work and a certain amount of casting done. Eugene Lee introduced me to his wife, who had designed the André Gregory *Alice in Wonderland*. Ours was an eccentric encounter.

She brought me a tattered black leather valise in which she had crammed bits of fabric, remnants from old costumes, old clothes, a piece of a shawl, an antimacasser from the back of a Victorian chair, a codpiece, a comb, a flower, a swatch of mattress ticking. Everything in the show would be made out of something used (later, when I had a series of run-throughs of the show, one friend spotted it: "You can't get those 'whites' in less than 50 years of washing"), and that would give it the feeling that we had emptied a closet, unlocked an attic trunk, a multiplicity of events, times, places.

She put three or four of these pieces on my desk and told me that they looked like the character of the Old Lady. Another collage, Cunégonde. If I put one next to another, against a third, I began to see the characters emerging. Something meshed, something seemed right about that kind of thinking. Now that I've seen how she executes her rather primitive sketches, I am surprised how sophisticated and detailed the work is. And witty.

Had I been doing a show for $600,000, I wouldn't have had the guts to go along with it. And therein lies one of the problems of the commercial theatre.

With *Candide* the risks were all artistic, and artistic risks must always be taken. You need never characterize whether you can afford them or not. The trouble too often in the commercial theatre is that artistic risks are disproportionately magnified.

There were to be six principal characters and six young men and six young girls, all of whom danced and sang, to play the rest of the roles.

Hugh and I decided early, before the first writing of the script, that whereas in the original production Pangloss had played one additional character, in our version, aside from Voltaire, he must appear as a major character in every sequence.

I talked to Jerry Orbach, not only a good friend but an adept farceur, about playing Voltaire/Pangloss. He was interested, and I let it go at that.

The next most important parts to cast were Candide and Cunégonde. In 1956 they had been trapped by the requirements of the score into being legitimate opera singers, and, excepting Barbara Cook, were too old for their roles. It was characteristic of that production that the performers seemed to watch from outside themselves and comment on the text.

We must have children this time, or as close as we could come to them. Our casting call at the Chelsea was for actors between the ages of 16 and 20. (Eventually we decided to look for our musicians from the rolls of newly graduated Juilliard students.)

I don't know how many Cunégondes we saw. An awful lot of girls can sing the "jewel song," but almost all of them kid the character. It seems irresistible to satirize Cunégonde.

Mark Baker and Maureen Brennan auditioned early on. They read beautifully, but the music department raised objections. So instead of signing Maureen and Mark in May, I agreed that the Chelsea and the music department would continue to look during the summer for other people, that Maureen and Mark would work on the score, and, come Labor Day, we would make a decision.

Meantime, I asked Nancy Walker to play the Old Lady (she wasn't interested) and Julie Newmar to play Paquette, the maid (she was).

Hugh was to arrive in the middle of the summer, which meant that I had about six weeks to forget the project. I had the designs and a script, the original *Candide* recording—I could play it occasionally when I felt like it—but I didn't have to concentrate, I didn't have any deadlines to meet. So I accepted and rejected the imminence of it as the spirit moved me. If I was a little bit bored and sunlogged, I began to think of *Candide* and ideas came. Simple ideas: perhaps the notion that the two kids undress each other during the song "Oh, Happy We," playing against the materialism in the lyrics.

My scripts are a mess by the first day of rehearsal. Covered in squiggles, they document better than anything the

changes in tone and detail that inform a project. Not only do I note specific staging ideas, but characteristics that I think are quirky or perverse, inconsistent. I'll write down Gertrude Stein's observation, "When you get there, there's no there there," and what caused me to think of it. Perhaps I'll see someone in a restaurant and I'll draw a picture of the hat she wore or tear out an illustration from a magazine. Collecting things on the way to rehearsal, and more and more striking them out with a red pencil, or writing "No!" meaning awful idea, inconsistent, or no longer valid. I don't have the self-discipline to cram for a play, cram atmosphere, cram character, delve microscopically into each speech to see what the subtext is. Instead, I take my time, and everything collects inside, where I can call on it instinctively.

At one point in the summer Jerry Orbach wrote, saying he had been offered the lead in *Mack and Mabel,* a David Merrick musical, and if by any chance *Candide* should extend its run in Brooklyn, he would not be available.

So Orbach was out. At the suggestion of friends at the Mark Taper, I asked Roscoe Lee Browne whether he would be interested. His agent in New York turned it down. And then I thought of Lewis Stadlen, who had been brilliant as Groucho Marx in *Minnie's Boys.* We made him an offer, but that remained unresolved until the fall.

Because I couldn't think of anybody to replace Nancy Walker and because Lewis Stadlen is in his twenties, I thought we should be consistent and cast young. Which made a problem with Julie Newmar.

We signed Mark Baker and Maureen Brennan. Then Lewis Stadlen turned us down on the basis that a stage direction in the script said "Voltaire plays this role in the fashion of Groucho Marx." I invited Stadlen to substitute another harmless, lecherous vaudevillean for Groucho, and he came up with Irwin Corey.

Other places in the script I characterized the Governor as Errol Flynn, and so Stadlen wears an Errol Flynn wig and a tatty Errol Flynn uniform. I arranged a reading of the play with a provisional cast, which included Mark and Maureen, Sam Fried, whom I'd picked for Maximillian, and June Gable, whom I had asked to read the Old Lady. It went even better than our fondest dreams, with Stadlen, adding an impersonation of Mel Brooks's Oldest Man in the World, as the Tibetan Monk.

In the meantime, unbeknownst to me, Julie Newmar signed to do a play for Joseph Papp. Problem solved.

## We had to find something funny, something for two pink sheep and a lion to sing

Soon after we had signed Lewis Stadlen, Roscoe Lee Browne called to ask what was happening with *Candide.* He had no knowledge of his agent's refusal on his behalf. This is not unusual.

At this point I sat down with Steve Sondheim to discuss new lyrics. We needed an opening number to introduce four of the leading characters of the play in a humorous way, to set a lightly cynical, informal tone for the show, and to establish the sensuality and the innocence of the people.

Hugh wrote a monologue for Voltaire designed to orient the audience to the time and place, and four vignettes, some of which Steve set to Bernstein's music from the Venice "Gavotte" and called "Life Is Happiness Indeed."

The first quatrain is Candide's and illustrates how to tell an audience quickly where it's going.

*(Candide is discovered on a hillock, an angry falcon perched on his left wrist)*
Life is happiness indeed:
Mares to ride and books to read.
Though of noble birth I'm not,
I'm delighted with my lot.

Though I've no distinctive features
And I've no official mother
I love all my fellow creatures
And the creatures love each other.
*(He releases the falcon, which is jerked clumsily from his wrist and shoots upward stiffly to disappear. A second later a large stuffed swan clunks down on the stage.)*

Cunégonde sings about the beautiful rosebush she's tending:

Life is happiness indeed:
I have everything I need.
I am rich and unattached
And my beauty is unmatched.

With the rose my only rival
I admit to some frustration;
What a pity its survival
Is of limited duration.*
*(In a fit of jealousy, she tears one of the roses from its branch.)*

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And so on. In each instance, the aftertaste.

In addition to the opening, we resurrected a Fons Pietatis, which Bernstein had written for the original.

Latouche and Bernstein had written "What a Lovely Day for an Auto da Fé," which became one of our "big" production numbers. We needed some solo lyrics in the middle section for spectators, and Sondheim provided those.

Sondheim also wrote a lament for Candide, using the Paris "Mazurka."

We had to find a substitution for the song "Eldorado," something funny, something for two pink sheep and a lion to sing. Eldorado figures importantly in the novel, describing a perfect society where human beings wilt from boredom. There was nothing wrong with the original "Eldorado" except that they had chosen to bypass Eldorado and we had chosen to visit it. Bernstein had written a lovely melody in 1956, "Fernando's Lullaby," and Steve set a lyric to it.

When we reexamined the script, in our efforts to keep everything moving, the sameness of pace was boring. We had to find places to stop for breath. The need to slow things down prompted a series of questions by Candide of a disembodied Voltaire. These questions and Voltaire's replies anchor the evening.

So much for the new material.

We went into rehearsal on October 21. I cautioned the young company not to turn our set into a gymnasium. This was not to be an evening with a stopwatch, not to be about racing and jumping and shouting and sweating, mindless aiming to please. If ever there was a show to which "less is more" applied, *Candide* would be it.

And subsequently, the few problems we had with performance involved effort—or rather, effort showing. I predicted that the environment, which was the show, was as off-putting as it was engaging. Just as many people were going to label it avant-garde hijinks on wooden boards. To counter that, we must respect the content, the structure, the rhythms, that Hugh had carefully provided. Vitality would follow effortlessly.

To protect myself, I scheduled six and a half weeks of rehearsals before the first preview. Pat Birch and I staged the show in eight days. Still, it had its advantages. If we had a sluggish day, we let it go. If things were going well, we worked a full five hours and quit. We rarely bothered to break for lunch—avoided coming back logy and distracted. If someone's voice was bothering him, he saved it. One of our girls was mugged on the second day of rehearsal. When she came back, it was

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good to see her, but her absence hadn't pressed us.

I began to appreciate the privileges of socialized theatre, the seven months that Dr. Walter Felsenstein required to direct *Fiddler on the Roof* in East Berlin. (I'm only kidding; given that time, I would go nuts.)

Also, we had the luxury of four weeks to try it on small groups of friends. Based on their responses, we kept filling and building. *Candide* evolved.

One of the things that made it all so much fun was that I was not worrying about returning an investment. I was not worrying about it running indefinitely. I was doing a show for five weeks in Brooklyn.

We opened over a 10-day period with critics at every performance. We were sold out beforehand and the Brooklyn run was extended two weeks. The reviews were marvelous, many suggesting a move to Broadway, the *Times* concerned that

## 'If you ask me . . . '

For the present my investors subsidize me. With costs spiraling, how long will that continue? Eventually commercial theatre will be subsidized by the National Endowment and individual foundations. Just imagine, had a foundation been half-owner of *Fiddler*, how many productions those profits would have financed. I recognize the stigma attached to such thinking, but perhaps the successful alliance of the Chelsea and my office will change things.

Benefit audiences used to be dangerous. They tended to clutter the aisles with sociability. And when the curtain went up, they turned apathetic and resentful of the price they had paid. But times have changed. They have acquired taste. The tickets are in part tax-deductible. The audiences have seen more shows and become more discriminating. Also, they are more polite. Maybe they are enjoying themselves.

The newspaper fellows who spend their lives extolling the freedom of nonprofit theatre have no idea how much more freedom there can be in the commercial theatre. All the politicking, campaigning in behalf of money. I sometimes wonder where is the marketplace and who are the merchants.

I am encouraged by the programs which speak to enlarging the theatre audience. Maybe it takes a real crisis. Anyway, the Theatre Development Fund's ticket booth has had tremendous effect on the business. I wish that producers with smash hits would make even a token allotment of seats. It is shortsighted not to have every attraction represented in the Times Square Booth.

There are those who miss the traditional opening night with all its glamor and dress-up. Weighed against the self-consciousness of perennial opening-nighters who don't go to theatre on any other night, anxious and overfriendly investors, and the press, I still prefer four openings with seats sold to the general public at the box office. Also, it forces the cast to pace itself and give a more natural performance.

I don't think the plan to pay off plays on tour before opening on Broadway is going to work. Touring isn't good for shows. The scenery, the costumes, and the actors wear out. More accurately, it is difficult for an actor to manage eight performances on tour and five hours of extensive rehearsal every day for a prolonged period. In addition, most of the new theatres on the road are too large to *fix* in.

JILL KREMENTZ

The theatre has become overly reliant on lawyers and agents. I find myself reminding them that with a hit you make a lot of money. Don't squeeze it dry. Leave something in it for the investors.

The only thing interesting to me in Pauline Kael's review of the *Fiddler* film is a sentence in which she said she'd never seen the play. How in hell can a person in the business of reviewing ignore the most esteemed works in the allied arts? Is it too much to ask that film critics visit the theatre and vice versa? That all critics visit museums and lecture halls and turn on their television sets? Pauline Kael should have seen the play. She had seven and a half years to see it.

The trouble with so many of the creative people on Broadway is that they don't read, they don't travel, they don't inform themselves. They are so talented and under-educated. In the regions they tend to be more educated than talented.

At the Film Festival in San Francisco (October, 1971) I was asked why I didn't direct the film versions of the musicals I had done. I replied I don't like movie musicals; I think there is a contradiction in terms.

I don't think you can make a creative person out of someone who isn't one. But I think you can encourage someone who has it buried so deeply inside that he might not get to it.

It has taken years, but the unions have finally agreed to permit the filming of theatrical performances to be kept in the Lincoln Center Library. Why should that have taken years?

About two years ago John Weidman, a law student at Yale, brought me the outline for a play about Commodore Perry's visit to Japan. It was realistic, in the style of the *Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*. Not the sort of theatre I care for. I suggested instead that he tell the story as though it were written by a Japanese playwright in the Kabuki style, with the Americans the traditional Kabuki villains. He has done that and called it *Pacific Overtures*. It will be a musical. Steve Sondheim is writing the score; Pat Birch choreographing; Boris Aronson is designing the scenery, Florence Klotz the costumes. It comes next.

No, the next one is for the Phoenix: Congreve's *Love for Love*. We went into rehearsal on Labor Day. I usually return from Europe the day before and go to work on the holiday. It's quiet, the phones don't ring, and the transportation is easy.

—Hal Prince

we might lose something in the course of it.

Now let's talk about how not to produce a show. Let's talk about how I ignored everything I'd learned or should have learned.

Kalfin and his partners, Michael David and Burl Hash, and Howard Haines, Ruth Mitchell, and I set out in search of space in Manhattan, preferably a ballroom. The available ballrooms are in old hotels and too small to contain us. The set in Brooklyn required a room at least 60 by 40 feet. In order to increase the capacity of the audience, we needed more than that. The larger hotels weren't interested. We couldn't compete with conventions.

Haines, my general manager, canvassed the City Center basement, an abandoned bowling alley, and for a time seemed to be doing business with the Waldorf Astoria for the Sert Room.

Always in the back of my mind was the possibility of the Broadway or Winter Garden Theatres, of stripping them of their seats and utilizing the space on their vast stages for a portion of our audience. Both theatres were available.

The Winter Garden would have been easier because its balcony is small, wasting less of the usable space on the orchestra floor, but it is a more sought-after theatre, and I reasoned the Shuberts would not give us contract to insure an indefinite run.

The Broadway, something of a white elephant, is a good theatre. Not as handsome as the Winter Garden, and a couple of blocks further up on Broadway, it is abutted by a rather ugly parking lot and surrounded by steadily declining real estate. Paradoxically, that was an advantage to us. I did not underestimate the ambience of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, of its faded elegant lobby, even more, of the fourth floor, where the Chelsea is. I coveted the ingratiating informality, the earnestness of its tatty peeling walls and threadbare carpets. I joked that there was even an additional thrill getting from the Atlantic Avenue subway station to the Academy of Music alive! Perhaps we would simulate that on Broadway and 53rd Street.

The economics of the production in Brooklyn were such that at capacity the Chelsea Theatre Center lost $4,000 a week. When they extended the run two weeks, that represented a sacrifice of $8,000. However, in order to move to Broadway (where they might realize some profits), we had to keep the weeks between the closing in Brooklyn and the opening on Broadway to a minimum.

What did moving quickly incur? Kalfin and I told the cast the good news, which

## There are 25 musicians on the payroll—18 of whom play, while 7 sit in the basement

was met with a great whoop of joy, and then the negotiating began. Billing, never a factor before, and television "out clauses" tended to give the lie to the original concept, which is that it was a group effort. All these things I understand. I understand how hazardous and frustrating an actor's life can be. The irony is simply that within minutes of the decision, the air surrounding the project was changing.

That was just the beginning, and the actors were the least of it.

Next we met with the architects, as well as Eugene Lee, to determine how to preserve the structure and increase the size of the audience observing the show. We figured the move to cost a couple of hundred thousand dollars, including building, advertising, and one week's rehearsal. The new structure had to qualify from the point of view of Fire and Building Department regulations, more rigorous in a Broadway theatre than they would have been in a ballroom.

We started to blueprint a production which would accommodate, we hoped, 1,000 people against the 180 in Brooklyn, and at the same time, preserve the original playing areas. We succeeded with the latter. The Broadway playing area is 20 feet longer than the one in Brooklyn, but the stages are identical.

To add capacity we created "the bleachers," on a first-come, first-served basis, and I moved the show into the bleachers whenever possible.

Instead of 1,000 seats, we settled for 900.

Simultaneously we petitioned the Musicians Local 802. Ordinarily the Broadway (capacity 1,800) by contract must carry a minimum of 25 musicians. With *Candide* at the Broadway (capacity 900), we requested an adjustment to reflect the new capacity. At a hearing before the union's Executive Board, I pointed out that in Brooklyn, according to that contract, we might have done the show with one pianist, but instead we had chosen to use 13 musicians.

The score had been orchestrated for 13 musicians and we hoped to transfer them to New York. With a capacity of 900 *Candide* was a risky proposition. It would take a minimum of 40 weeks to return its investment, but once it had, it represented a chance for the Chelsea to see some money. Twenty-five musicians and necessary reorchestrations would delay that.

They rejected our petition.

It was too late to turn back. We had closed in Brooklyn on January 20, and in order to reopen without losing momentum, we were obliged to sign the Broadway Theatre contract, move ahead with the architects, and spend money advertising our plan while awaiting the union's decision. It never occurred to me they would turn us down.

We requested a second hearing, this time before the Musical Theatre Committee of the union. It was pointed out by Gerald Schoenfeld of the Shubert Organization that the Broadway Theatre had been empty for 13 months (excepting one night for the Miss U.S.A. Pageant), that we were bringing in a hit musical which might run there indefinitely, providing we could keep the operating expenses within sensible limits. Ruth Mitchell informed them that there would be other productions, if the show succeeded on Broadway—in Los Angeles, Boston, and so on—giving jobs to musicians (of course, from other locals!).

The union turned *them* down.

It is interesting that when the musicians' union turned us down the second time, the stagehands' union called and offered to intervene. They did and it didn't work.

There was a third hearing, at which time the musicians' union ruled that while 25 musicians were mandatory, we would not have to pay them extra for wearing funny hats and vests while playing (ordinarily they get about $68 a week more for that).

Three weeks had gone by and it was too late to cancel the show. We decided we could not afford to reorchestrate; consequently, there are 25 musicians on the payroll, 18 of whom play, while 7 sit in the basement.

I wrote the union.

January 28, 1974

Mr. Max Aarons, President
American Federation of Musicians
Local 802
261 West 52nd Street
New York City 10019

Gentlemen:

I can't repress the desire to tell you how insulting I thought the behavior accorded me at the meeting I was invited to attend before the Executive Board of Local 802.

It is unprecedented in my 20 years as an active producer of musicals to have met with so little knowledge of not only what I do in the theatre, but what is done by my peers.

*continued*

We approached you to aid us in making a production viable on Broadway so that it can relight a theatre which has been closed for over a year and perhaps give employment to musicians, actors, stagehands, wardrobe women, etc., here and across the country. The rudeness, the outright suspicion, with which our request for practical help was met prompts me to make the following statement.

Personally, I have made my first and last appearance before your august board. Also whenever possible—and I think it will be possible more often than not—I will seek to design my future productions for the smaller theatres. The lack of logic that motivated your final decision to force us to use 25 musicians in a theatre with a seating capacity of 900 bears out my worst fears, that the theatre is not dying: rather, it is being systematically killed.

Sincerely,
Harold Prince

(How can I feel this way about people who play the violin!)

Isn't it possible that we are reaching a time when unions must assume a responsibility for the future of the theatre? Is it too much to suggest that a committee of last resort be established from among the producers, the artists, the craft unions to deal expeditiously with problems that affect the entire industry? This committee should be headed by an impartial figure with some political and public-relations experience, but more important, someone whose stature would command respect from the individual guilds and unions.

Surely the collaboration of artists to create a play is an impossible concept, but it works. Why, then, cannot groups of the same artists collaborate to the benefit of all?

I had problems with Equity as well. In the Broadway we found that because of the choreography, the actors could not be heard singing Sondheim's solo lines in the "Auto da Fé." I phoned Equity the day before we opened and asked for permission to tape those eight lines during a performance without paying each of the actors a week's salary. (At this point we were $100,000 over budget.) I was informed that the Equity Council was not meeting until the following week. By that time we would be open. I urged them to make an exception. They turned me down. I went back to the theatre and cut the two quatrains, and Pat Birch pieced the number together.

The move to Broadway became the responsibility, more than anyone else, of Howard Haines, working with the architect (Leslie Armstrong of Armstrong, Childs and Associates, who had supervised the musical *Dude* a year earlier in the same theatre), a consulting engineer (Henry M. Garsson), and the builder

## I loved working on 'Candide' in Brooklyn and I hated bringing it to Broadway

(Peter Feller). I never saw *Dude,* but we benefited from the experience of that production in money, time, and, one hopes, wear and tear on the nerves, but I can't imagine being *more* apprehensive that I was in the seven-week period during which we reconstructed the interior of the Broadway to the specifications of the city agencies.

No sooner had we accommodated their rules, but I would come into the theatre and eliminate seats. One day I took out 121 in the bleacher section because of sightlines. The point is, with *Candide,* no one in the audience sees everything, but everyone must see almost everything.

There's no question but that we couldn't have gotten *Candide* on without Peter Feller's help. Over those seven weeks he would no sooner get the structure up when he would have to change it. Raise this row, take out these seats, raise that stage, put backs on those benches, guardrails along that aisle, and so on.

By the time we were ready for Tharon Musser, she had two and a half days to light the show.

At the Chelsea there was no amplification. On Broadway the problems were critical. We brought Jack Mann over from *Night Music* to solve them. Five minutes before we opened the doors for our first performance Tharon was adjusting specials, Jack was concealing shotgun microphones (a patron refused to sit next to one of them, explaining that she likes to talk during a show), Howard Haines was still numbering seats, and I was rehearsing the ushers.

Adjusting *Candide* to the Broadway was more like opening a new hotel than a play. (Are the elevators working? How is room service?)

I had anticipated some problems acclimating the audience to an unfamiliar environment, but it was far worse than I imagined. Coming in off Broadway, under a conventional marquee, into a conventional lobby, the structure frightened them. There is a book, *The Hidden Dimension,* by Edward Hall, which deals in detail with the amount of space an individual requires in order to feel secure. It differs with the individual. It is an instinct shared by animals. There is a Spanish word, *querencia,* which defines the space around the bull which he needs to remain passive. When the bullfighter violates that space, the bull charges.

Our audience charged, some refusing seat locations, complaining about sightlines, maximizing the discomforts of grandstand seating. An environment which would have been acceptable to them in a ball park offended them in a theatre.

So the Chelsea redecorated the lobby, covered the marble floor with unfinished plywood, set up hot-dog-and-beer stands, hung balloons and streamers and the canvas drops from the Chelsea production to obliterate the crystal chandeliers and the gold leaf. Then Michael David designed an advertising campaign defining the *Candide* person. The *Candide* person buys a can of beer and fills his pockets with free peanuts on the way in. He sits on a wooden bench with a back or in the pit on a padded stool. If he can't see something, he rises in his seat. If he's in the pit, he turns 360 degrees to catch the action. It worked.

Now that you can see from the seats and there are pads on them, and backs on all but those in the pit (and the bleachers), I assumed the complaint letters would stop coming in. They haven't. Not entirely. And that is because so much of the Broadway audience today is corrupt, concerned with creature comforts, rejecting the experience. If you gave those people beds, they could come in and sleep and we wouldn't have to worry about what we put up on the stage.

Part of the blame is ours for desensitizing them, but if the theatre is to be a collaboration of living beings on either side of the proscenium, then they are derelict in their responsibilities.

I have said that each play seeds the next. Nowhere is it more apparent than with the success of *Candide.*

I have known for years that content dictates form, but in *Baker Street* I didn't have the courage to go full distance with the form, and in *Zorba* I tried to twist the content to fit the form. In *Candide* form and content merged easily.

It occurs to me that I loved working on *Candide* in Brooklyn and I hated bringing it to Broadway.

I must conclude from this that I am growing older, the wear and tear on the nerves is more difficult to take. Is it possible that explains why so many theatre artists seem to retire in their forties or move away from directing or writing for the theatre into a more solitary creative experience?

Or, and this is just as likely, maybe I simply don't enjoy producing.