

mercer

arts

center

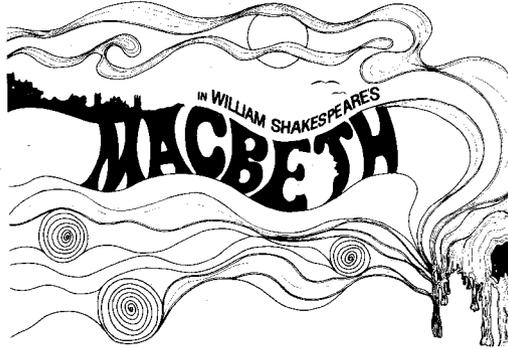
mercer
arts
center

RECOMMEND
LEWIS
THE
KOO'S

MERCER-HANSBERRY THEATRE
 240 Mercer Street (1 Block W. of B'way at W. 3rd)

CORA GAY CARR AND JERRY SCHLOSSBERG PRESENT

RIP TORN **GERALDINE PAGE**



CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED
DINO DEFILIP
MERCER O'CASEY
 240 MERCER ST. N.Y.C.

Sankowich

THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS

BEST AMERICAN PLAY
 N.Y. CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD 1970

MERCER O'CASEY THEATRE
 240 Mercer Street (W. 3rd St.)
 (Between W. 4th St. & W. 5th St.)

"SEE THIS PLAY - ONE OF THE BEST THIS SEASON!"
 —Barnes, N.Y. Times

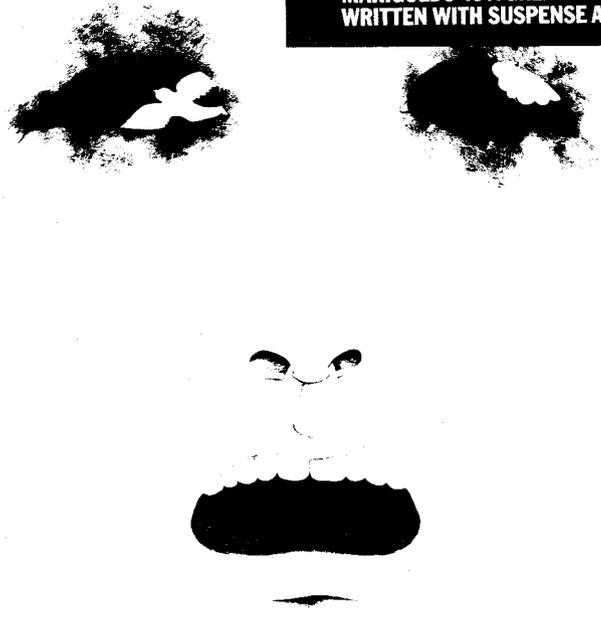
"BRAVOS TO ALL! A BEAUTIFUL PLAY!"
 —Talbott, N.Y. Post

"'MARIGOLDS' IS A GREAT HUMAN DRAMA WRITTEN WITH SUSPENSE AND COMEDY!"
 —Lee Silver, Daily News

The Chicago Free Theater presents
 A special one week engagement
aesop's fables
 A rock opera by William Russo
 text by Jon Swan

Wednesday, May 26 — 7:30 and 9:30 P.M.
 Thursday, May 27 — 7:30 and 9:30 P.M.
 Friday, May 28 — 8:30 and 10:30 P.M.
 Saturday, May 29 — 8:30 and 10:30 P.M.
 Sunday, May 30 — 3:00, 8:30 and 10:30 P.M.

Mercer O'Casey Theatre 240 Mercer Street
 one block west of Broadway at West 3rd
 admission free



DALE WASSERMAN'S
"ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST."
 From the book by Ken Kesey

Mercer-Hansberry Theatre, 240 Mercer St., (1 block W. of B'way near W. 3rd St.), Box Office Phone: 673-3937

Wanne be propositioned?

"a very clever party!"
 CLIVE BARNES
 NEW YORK TIMES AND WORX

THE PROPOSITION
 A MUSICAL REVUE 4TH YEAR/DIRECTED BY ALLAN ALBERT
MERCER-SHAW ARENA 240 MERCER STREET/OR 3-3937

DARK OF THE MOON

MERCER-SHAW ARENA
 240 mercer street. nyc · phone OR 3-3937

BEST AMERICAN PLAY
 N.Y. CRITICS' CIRCLE AWP 1977

673-3937

MERCER O'CASEY THEATRE
 240 MERCER STREET (BETWEEN BLEECKER & THIRD STREETS)



the mercer arts center

240 Mercer Street

New York, N.Y. 10012

(212) 673-3937

Mercer Hansberry

Mercer Shaw Arena

Mercer O'Casey

Mercer Brecht

Viveca Lindfors'
"An Actor Works"

Gene Frankel's
"Workshop"

The Kitchen

Oscar Wilde Room

Directors:

Allan Albert

Roger Englander

Gene Frankel

S. C. Kaback

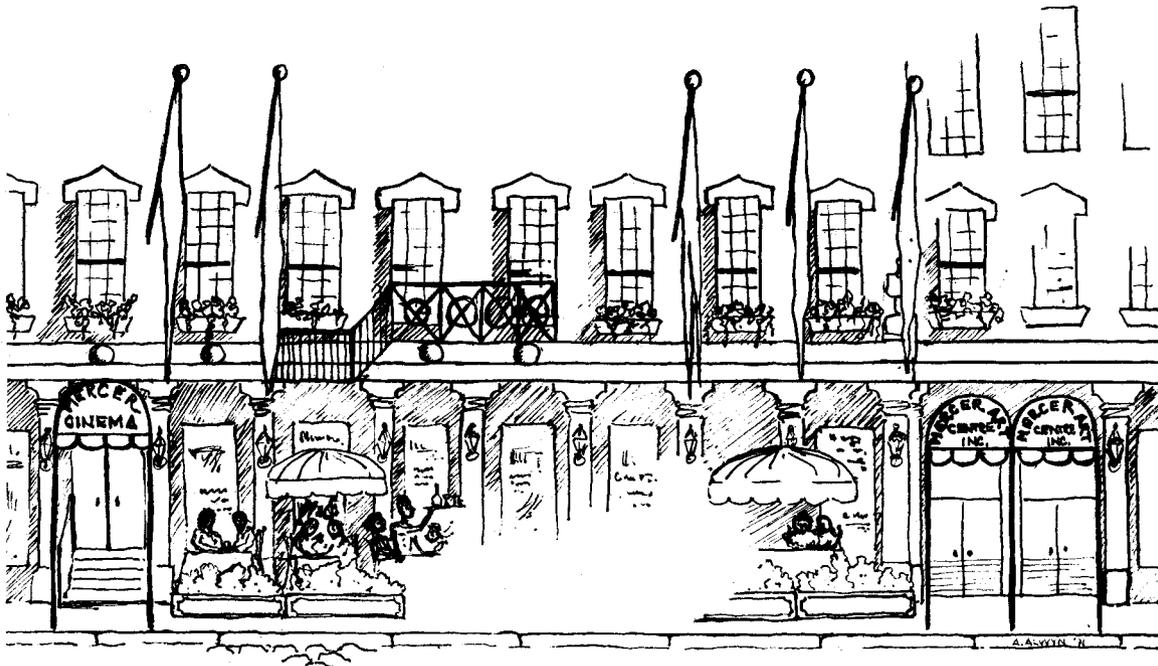
Irving Koven

Viveca Lindfors

Rip Torn

Steina Vasulka

Woody Vasulka



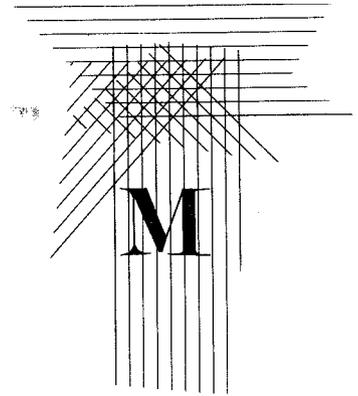
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The **MERCER ARTS CENTER** is a specially designed complex that brings together all the various performing arts (both live and media) including off-Broadway theatrical productions, film, dance, music, experimental work in video-tape and cable television, multi-media rock festivals, laboratory productions of work in progress, poetry reading, classes in acting, voice and movement, as well as eating and drinking facilities.

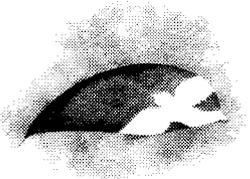
All of this wide variety of activity in the Center serves as a touchstone for further creative development among the resident artists. Traditional productions are mounted side by side with the most experimental productions of new properties. Repertory theaters are learning the uses and esthetics of film and video tape and the modern media is sharing the benefits of classical training and goals. Both the resident artists and the Center's patrons share in the benefits of this extraordinary stimuli. The most creative imaginations and intellects of the time are gathering and working productively, exchanging ideas and skills with each other in a conducive environment.

Physically, the Center, when completed, will house seven cabaret-theaters, rehearsal space, two acting schools, editing rooms, construction space for sets, props, and costumes, several small bars, a restaurant, offices, and have access to a 1500 car parking lot.

An evening at the Mercer Arts Center is impulsive and casual. Patrons can drop in on the spur of the moment and be sure of finding something interesting to do. The spectrum of possible uses, under the Center's cabaret-theater licenses, range from political cabaret to traditional theater to experimental work in any new artistic form. Eating and drinking facilities in the heart of an artistic center make it a natural gathering place for professionals and neophytes to exchange ideas.



Sankowich/Gold
press



DALE WASSI
"ONE FLEW OVER THE MOON"
From the book!

Mercer University Theatre, 240 Mercer St., (at) 10th St., New York, NY 10012

the mercer arts center

HISTORY

Compiled by Joseph Devorkin

The creation of a new theatre complex at this location completes a historical cycle. The Mercer Arts Center stands on a site which in the 19th Century contained one of New York's better known playhouses — from 1850 to 1867.

Our thanks are extended to Mr. Devorkin for his compilation of this story of the Mercer Arts Center's previous identities. Mr. Devorkin is a writer and a historian on old Greenwich Village. Many of his articles on the background of the region have been published in the well-known weekly newspaper, *The Villager*. He is currently engaged in writing a book concerning certain phases of the district, including a section devoted to its theatres in the 19th Century.

Until the mid-1850s the neighborhood was principally residential. With the rapid increase in New York City's population and its irresistible movement northward, a need for hotel accommodations for foreign and out-of-town visitors brought the erection of LAFARGE HOUSE, a commodious and outstanding hostelry, on this property, where the Mercer Street side included TRIPLER HALL, a concert auditorium.

The background of the theatre is replete with exciting events — too many to recount here in detail. Set forth are some of the more important happenings.

Jenny Lind — "The Swedish Nightingale" — whose manager was P.T. Barnum, the great showman, was to have made her American debut at TRIPLER HALL. Not ready in time for her opening concert, Mr. Barnum arranged for her appearance at CASTLE GARDEN, a vast coliseum at the foot of Manhattan Island, where she made concert history on a May night in 1850. It was followed by a series of fifteen concerts at TRIPLER HALL within a four week period, in the fall of that year.

In February 1852, a memorial service was held in TRIPLER HALL to honor the renowned novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, who died the preceding September. The presiding personage was Daniel Webster, statesman and legislator; with eulogies delivered by Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant; distinguished authors and intimate friends of the deceased writer.

The English novelist, William M. Thackeray, completing a tour of the nation, lectured in a farewell appearance at TRIPLER HALL.

TRIPLER HALL and the adjoining LAFARGE HOUSE were destroyed in a conflagration in January 1854. Restored, the auditorium was re-opened in September of that year — carrying the ponderous title of NEW YORK THEATRE and METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE.

In the course of time changes in managements brought a series of changes in name. In 1855 it became LAURA KEENE'S VARIETIES. In 1856 it acquired the name of Burton's (new LONDON) THEATRE. During the year following the brilliant Shakesperian thespian Edwin Booth opened in Richard III.

Another change took place in 1859 when the title WINTER GARDEN was adopted. Booth returned in the 1860s when he starred in Hamlet; resulting in an unparalleled run of 100 consecutive performances — "a triumph unknown in the annals of the drama."

In 1865 when playing at the WINTER GARDEN at the time when President Lincoln was assassinated by his brother John Wilkes Booth, the tragedian had to be escorted by police officers through the lobby of LAFARGE HOUSE to his dressing room in the theatre in order to avoid angry crowds.

Other stage celebrities who appeared in the theatre during different 19th Century periods included Charlotte Cushman – 1857 – and Joseph Jefferson (the elder) – circa 1859.

When the WINTER GARDEN was destroyed again by fire in 1869, it was never rebuilt.

Returning to the hotel phase of the site, LAFARGE HOUSE was reconstructed and enlarged in 1854. Following the 1869 conflagration a newer, greatly expanded and more elegant hostelry was erected. It was one of New York's most important caravansaries. It was first named GRAND CENTRAL HOTEL; then THE SOUTHERN; finally the BROADWAY CENTRAL HOTEL.

During the later decades of the 19th Century various episodes took place in the hotel. Edward Stokes, wealthy man-about-town, vied with James Fisk, unscrupulous railroad tycoon and playboy, for the affections of Josie Mansfield, a showgirl beauty. The rivalry came to a tragic end when Stokes shot and killed Fisk on the grand stairway of the hotel.

The professional game of baseball reached maturity in 1876 when the National League was organized here.

During the 1860s and 70s Charley Pfaff's rathskeller restaurant thrived in a location several buildings south of the hotel. It was a favorite gathering place for literary "Bohemians". Famous among the many were Walt Whitman, Artemus Ward, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, John Burroughs, William Dean Howells, Georges Clemenceau, later Premier of France (who earlier taught French in a Greenwich Village school).

During the "Gay 90s" "Diamond Jim" Brady, master salesman and wealthy epicure, often dined lavishly on the fine foods served in the BROADWAY CENTRAL restaurants. He occasionally gave dinners to intimate groups in private dining rooms on the second floor of the hotel. Two such rooms are part of the present Mercer Arts Center complex – retaining much of their one-time grandeur, with crystal chandeliers, gilded walls and huge fireplaces, adorned in rococo style.

After the turn of the century, Trotsky's Kosher Restaurant was conducted at the BROADWAY CENTRAL. A Russian emigre of Jewish background named Leon Borenstein was attracted to the hotel because of it. He subsequently revisited Russia sailing from Halifax, Nova Scotia. He returned months later with forged documents under the adopted name of Leon Trotsky, and then settled in Mexico.

Such is the background of this new and vital group of theatres and accompanying facilities.



the mercer arts center

DESCRIPTION

The Mercer Arts Center is a two-floor multi-media facility with maximum ceiling heights. It is not only to be used for theatrical production but for motion picture and television filming.

Its main floor consists of two facilities: the **MERCER HANSBERRY THEATER**, with a seating capacity of 299 and the **MERCER BRECHT**, with a capacity of 199. The stage has five large dressing rooms with separate toilet facilities.

The main entrance of the **HANSBERRY THEATER** not only provides access to the box office and public toilets, but the lobby has facilities for serving liquor and food. This area also has kitchen facilities to provide service for a street cafe as well as intermission refreshments.

Adjacent, with a separate entrance, is the **MERCER BRECHT**. It has a separate box office, public toilets, and refreshment facilities.

Directly across from the main entrances to the complex is a 1500 capacity car park with special rates to patrons. This is open to the public with entrances from Bleecker and West Third Street and is only two blocks from the center of Greenwich Village.

The second floor of the Arts Center Complex is the heart of the building, with four cabaret-theaters, rehearsal space, two acting schools, offices, a Bar-restaurant, public toilets, and other space easily adaptable to the widening scope of media entertainment.

The **MERCER O'CASEY** has a capacity of 299 with tiered seating. There are eight dressing rooms and several toilets.

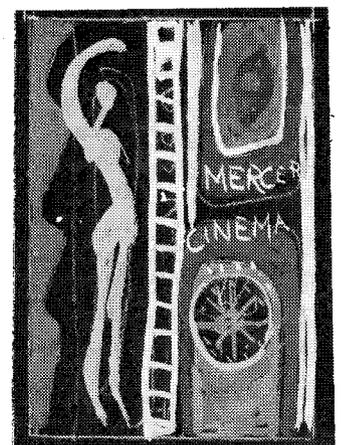
The **MERCER SHAW ARENA** is a theater-in-the-round with a capacity of 224. A tiered seating arrangement allows for a fluid participation between actor and audience. It has separate dressing room and toilet facilities.

THE OSCAR WILDE ROOM is a cabaret theatre seating 200. It has a thrust stage that can be arranged in shapes to suit the particular production. It also has its own separate dressing rooms and public bathrooms as well as a private exit onto Broadway.

THE KITCHEN, known also as the **MERCER MEDIA REPERTORY THEATER**, is ideal for multi-media entertainment. It has a capacity of 199 and is a large, attractive room with a recently constructed dance floor.

OBIE ALLEY is an intimate theatrical bar where patrons can get drinks and light snacks before and after performances. It is decorated with pictures of Obie Award winners in an attractive black and white design providing a convenient place for patrons to wait for friends or for the performance to begin.

MERCER CABARET LOUNGE is a futuristic style night club. Decorated with mirrors and modern Columbo furniture it provides a congenial late night drinking and eating entertainment spot. Casual musical entertainment is provided but with no admission charge, no cover, and no minimum.



The **GENE FRANKEL THEATER WORKSHOP** and the **VIVECA LINDFORS' "AN ACTOR WORKS"** are two acting schools run by these distinguished professionals to train the neophyte and help the established actor polish his craft. Both will be offering work in acting, voice, and movement, and occasional show-case productions.

The rehearsal space in the Center combines immediate access to the Mercer Theaters with large halls for all types of rehearsal from ballet to rock opera, from stage performances to film and television blocking.

An advisory council of established leaders in media and professional theater at the Mercer Arts Center will provide its tenants with years of experience in the artistic and managerial aspects of professional entertainment. It will also shape the future growth and development of the life of the Center.

The Mercer Arts Center is a commercial endeavor that will not depend on grants or subsidy for its economic life. Underlying the entire concept has been the recognition of the economics of theatrical entertainment today. Production costs are skyrocketing as we have what is essentially a handcrafted item in an age of mass-production. Many producers are successfully looking to Off-Broadway, not only to present their plays, but to experiment with properties where the ancillary rights are, in many instances, of greater financial reward than the production itself. The Mercer Arts Center will help its resident companies in the realization of these subsidiary rights.

The Mercer Arts Center can be of further financial assistance to resident productions by reducing operating costs through the use of shared physical space (box office, front of house, common maintenance and management staffs) and through the use of joint promotional efforts (shared mailings and advertising). Side-by-side theaters mean greater traffic generated and shared by all productions using the Center facilities. This concept, originally conceived on Broadway's Shubert Alley, is now the heart of every shopping mall concept in retailing.

The Mercer Arts Center has been pleased to add Lee Welling's **GROUP SALES SERVICE** to its staff. Group Sales Service is the organization that handles theatre parties for all the major Broadway productions (the David Merrick and Hal Prince shows etc.) They have never before handled an Off-Broadway enterprise and have agreed to take on the complex only because they saw an exciting opportunity for their clients to experience a new theatrical adventure. Group Sales Service is able to arrange for groups to have the convenience of both dinner and a play as part of a theatre party. And Group Sales Service has added special Wednesday matinees for high school groups. If they have enough notice they can have the productions schedule special performances. The advantages of Group Sales Service to the resident theatre companies are obvious and too numerous to mention here.

This, the Mercer Arts Center will open up an enormous range of possibilities for a unique complex in terms of economic viability and artistic regeneration that can expand and grow and adapt to the changing times.

Wanna be propositioned?

"a very clever party!"

CLIVE BARNES
NEW YORK TIMES AND WO

PROPOSITION
A MUSICAL REVUE 4TH YEAR / DIRECTED BY ALLAN AL
MERCER-SHAW ARENA 240 MERCER STREET

CORA GAY CARR AND JERRY SCHLOSS

RIP TORN GERALD PAG

IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARES

MACBETH

CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY
DINO DEFILIPPI

MERCER O'CASEY PLAYHOUSE
240 MERCER ST. N.Y.C. (212) 673-3937

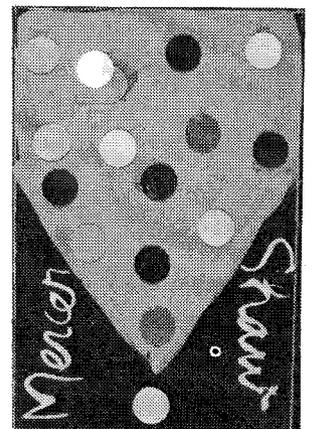
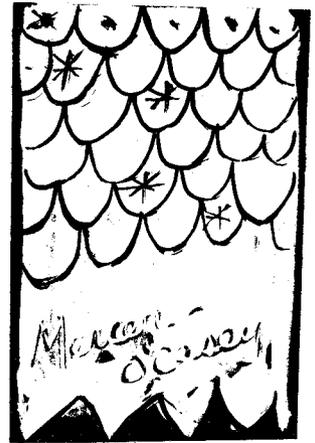
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MERCER ARTS CENTER

The board of directors of the Mercer Arts Center is composed of distinguished practicing professional artists whose function is creative direction and not fund-raising. All are actively involved and working in the Center helping to shape the direction of its future growth and development.

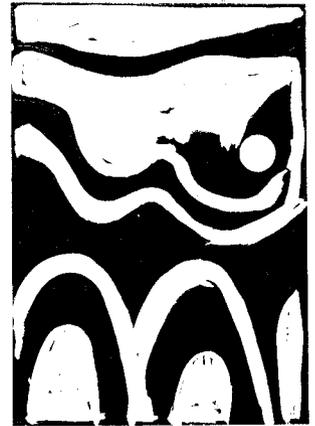
Along with Seymour C. Kaback, owner and developer of the Center, the board includes: Allan Albert, Roger Englander, Gene Frankel, Irving Koven, Viveca Lindfors, Rip Torn, and Steina and Woody Vasulka.

Allan Albert is the director/conceiver of "The Proposition", an improvised musical revue playing at the Center since last spring. The 26 year old Mr. Albert has been the producer/director of "The Proposition" in Boston since 1969 and last year was appointed artistic director of Boston's Charles Playhouse. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Amherst College and was a Doctor of Fine Arts candidate at the Yale School of Drama. He has taught and directed there and at the Choate School. Mr. Albert has been a consultant for the Harvard Business School Arts Committee and for multi-media education in the Philadelphia School System as well as director of the New England Theatre Conference.

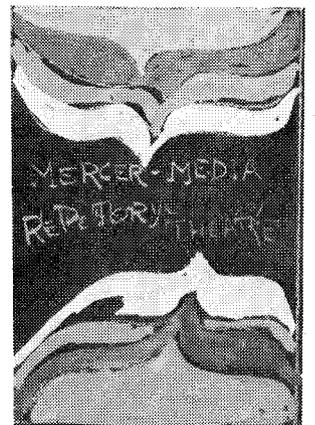
Working as media consultant with Woody and Steina Vasulka in the Mercer Arts Kitchen is **Roger Englander**. Perhaps best known for his work in television as producer/director of C.B.S.'s "New York Young People's Concerts with Leonard Bernstein"; "Vladimir Horowitz at Carnegie Hall"; "The Bell Telephone Hour"; and more recently "The Great American Dream Machine". Among his many other credits and honors, Mr. Englander is the recipient of four Emmy Awards and has served on the advisory panel on dance for the National Endowment of the Arts; as consultant to the Educational Broadcasting Corporation; as trustee to the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences; as a member of the Executive Committee Internationales Institut fur Musik; Tanz Und Theater In Den Audio-visuellen Media; and as a member of the Councel International de la Musique. Mr. Englander also holds a Ph.B. from the University of Chicago. At the Mercer Arts Center, Mr. Englander will be developing some experimental work with video-tape and cable television.



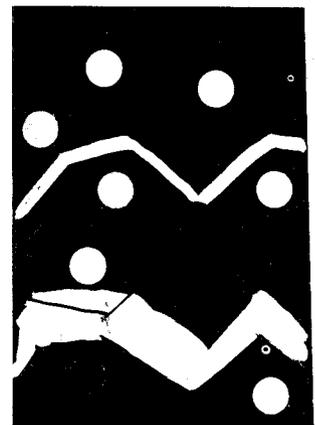
Gene Frankel, an outstanding professional director on and off-Broadway for 30 years, will be moving his offices and his celebrated theatre school to the Mercer Arts Center. Mr. Frankel's many credits include directing the American premiere of "Indians" at the Arena Stage and on Broadway. In addition, he has directed "A Cry of Players"; "To Be Young Gifted And Black"; "Brecht On Brecht"; and "The Blacks" among many other distinguished productions. He has received the first Lola D'Annunzio Award, the Vernon Rice Award, and twice received the Obie. This fall he will be directing "Gunplay" off-Broadway and "Lost In The Stars" for the Kennedy Center in Washington. On the international scene, Mr. Frankel toured Europe with a production of "Emperor Jones" (starring James Earl Jones); and a production of "Oh Dad, Poor Dad . . .". In his theatre school, Mr. Frankel will train young actors, directors, and playwrights. Particular attention will be given to mounting the work of young playwrights so that they can see live performances in a workshop situation. There will also be a teenage and children's workshop conjoined with the school.



Seymour C. Kaback, President of the Mercer Arts Center, is a successful business executive, a professional engineer and designer, and a theatrical innovator. Former President of Weathermatic Corporation and Executive Vice-President of Mebco Industries, (both public companies) he now heads Kaback Enterprises, a mechanical engineering consultant firm with headquarters in the Mercer Arts Center.



Mr. Irving Koven, President of Ambassador Construction, has become co-owner of the Mercer Arts Center and Mr. Koven's corporation has been responsible for the major portion of the recently completed construction work at the center. Ambassador Construction is one of the leading general contractors in the metropolitan area. Gucci's Fifth Avenue, Mario Valentino, and the Yves St. Laurent shops are representative examples of their work. Mr. Koven has contributed his experience, his professional expertise, and all the facilities of his organization toward making this center a reality.



The internationally acclaimed actress, **Viveca Lindfors**, will also be running a workshop program in connection with the New School for Social Research called "An Actor Works". Miss Lindfors' career has included appearances in over 40 motion pictures, earning her several international film awards. She appeared on Broadway in the title role in "Anastasia" and appeared off-Broadway in "Brecht On Brecht"; "Miss Julie"; and "King Lear". She is preparing a program for off-Broadway for the fall entitled "I Am A Woman". In her workshop, Miss Lindfors will be assisted by coaches in movement, speech and singing. And her company, "The Strolling Players", will be developing new work on the premises.

The distinguished character actor, **Rip Torn**, is also serving on the board and will house his repertory company in the Center. Last season he performed in the Center in "MacBeth" with his wife, Geraldine Page. More recently, he was seen in Strindberg's "Dance of Death" with Viveca Lindfors. A winner of two Obie Awards (one for directing "The Beard" and the other for acting in "Deer Park"), Mr. Torn was a major organizer of the famed Actors' Studio before embarking on his career in television and film. He has been working on a production of "Richard III" as Richard Nixon, a festival of Chekhov one act plays, and has recently completed the films "Coming Apart", "Tropic of Cancer", "Maidstone", and "Payday".

Woody and Steina Vasulka are the co-founders of the Mercer Arts Kitchen where they are developing experimental work in video-tape and other media. Before they joined forces, both professionally and personally, at the University in Prague; Mr. Vasulka was an independant documentary film-maker in Czechoslovakia and Mrs. Vasulka was a free lance violinist in her native Iceland. As the Vasulkas they are independant video-tape producers with exhibits scheduled this fall in the Whitney Museum and the Avant Garde Festival. In the past they have exhibited at the WBAI Free Music Store, the Video Festival at Westbeth, and the Video Free America Show in San Francisco. In addition, Mr. Vasulka is the technical director of the Alternate Media Center at NYU oriented to 1/2 inch cable television.



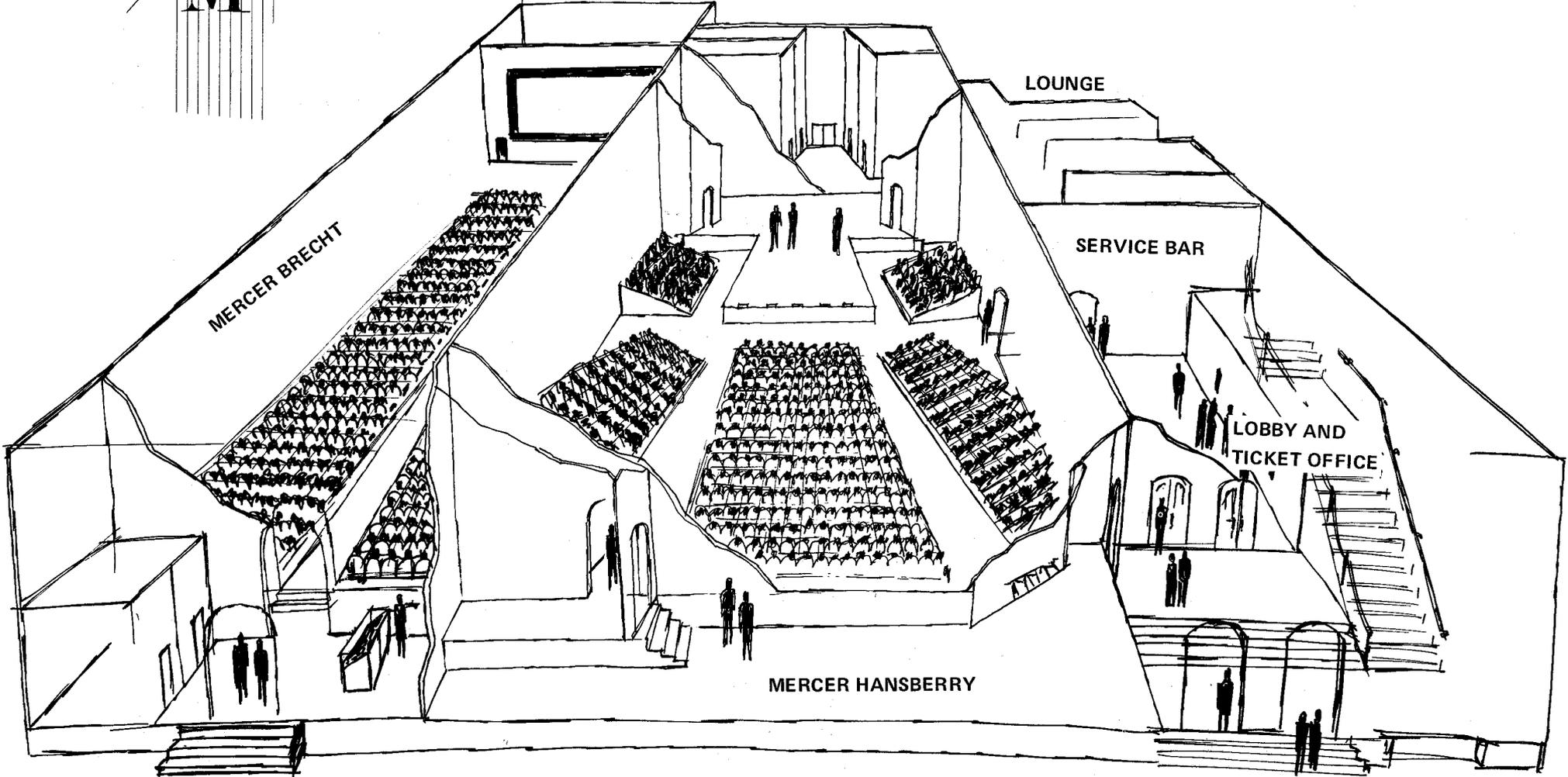
MERCER ARTS CENTER

FIRST FLOOR

MERCER HANSBERRY

MERCER BRECHT

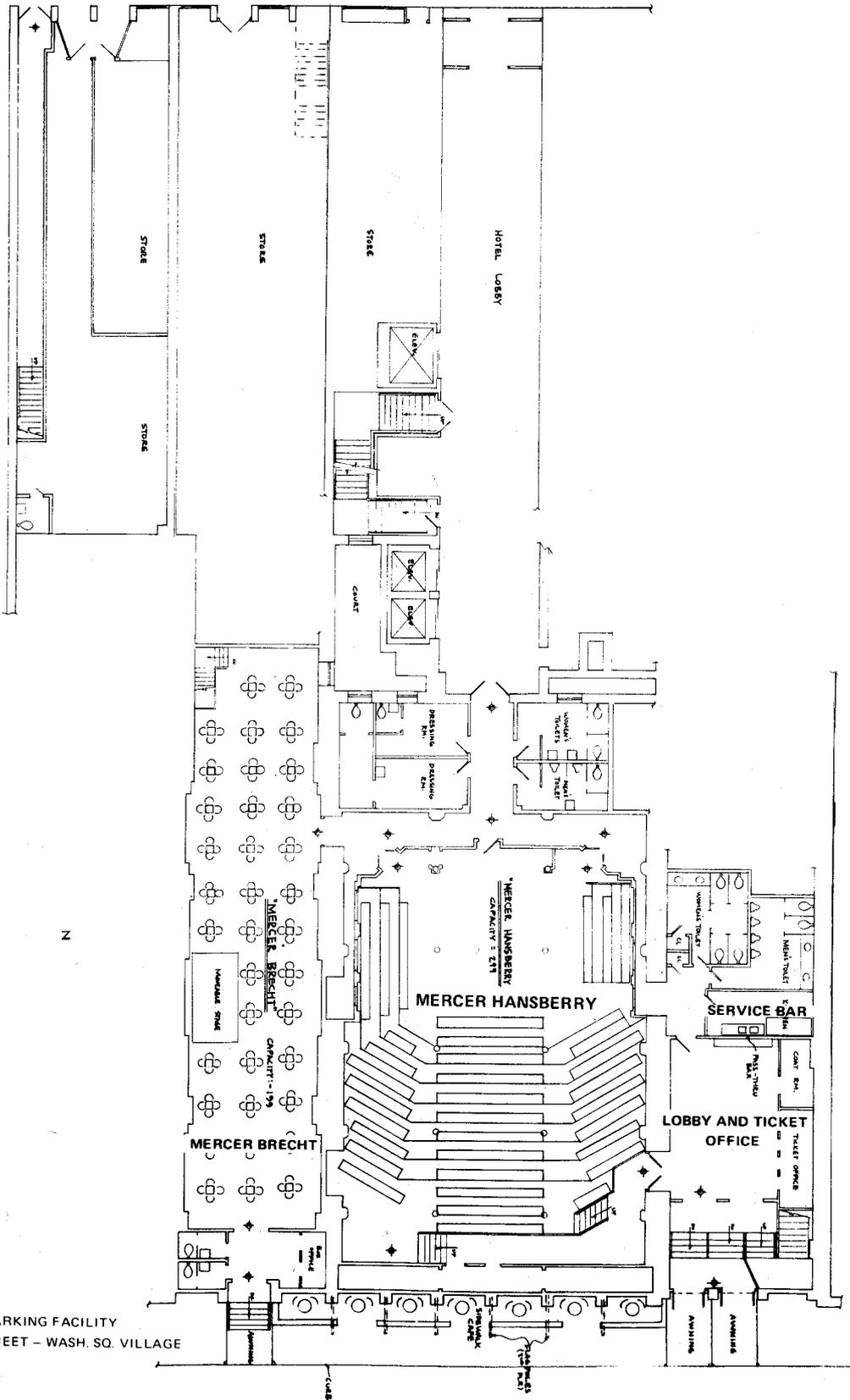
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MERCER ARTS CENTER

FIRST FLOOR

BROADWAY



1500 CAR PARKING FACILITY
ACROSS STREET - WASH. SQ. VILLAGE

MERCER ST.

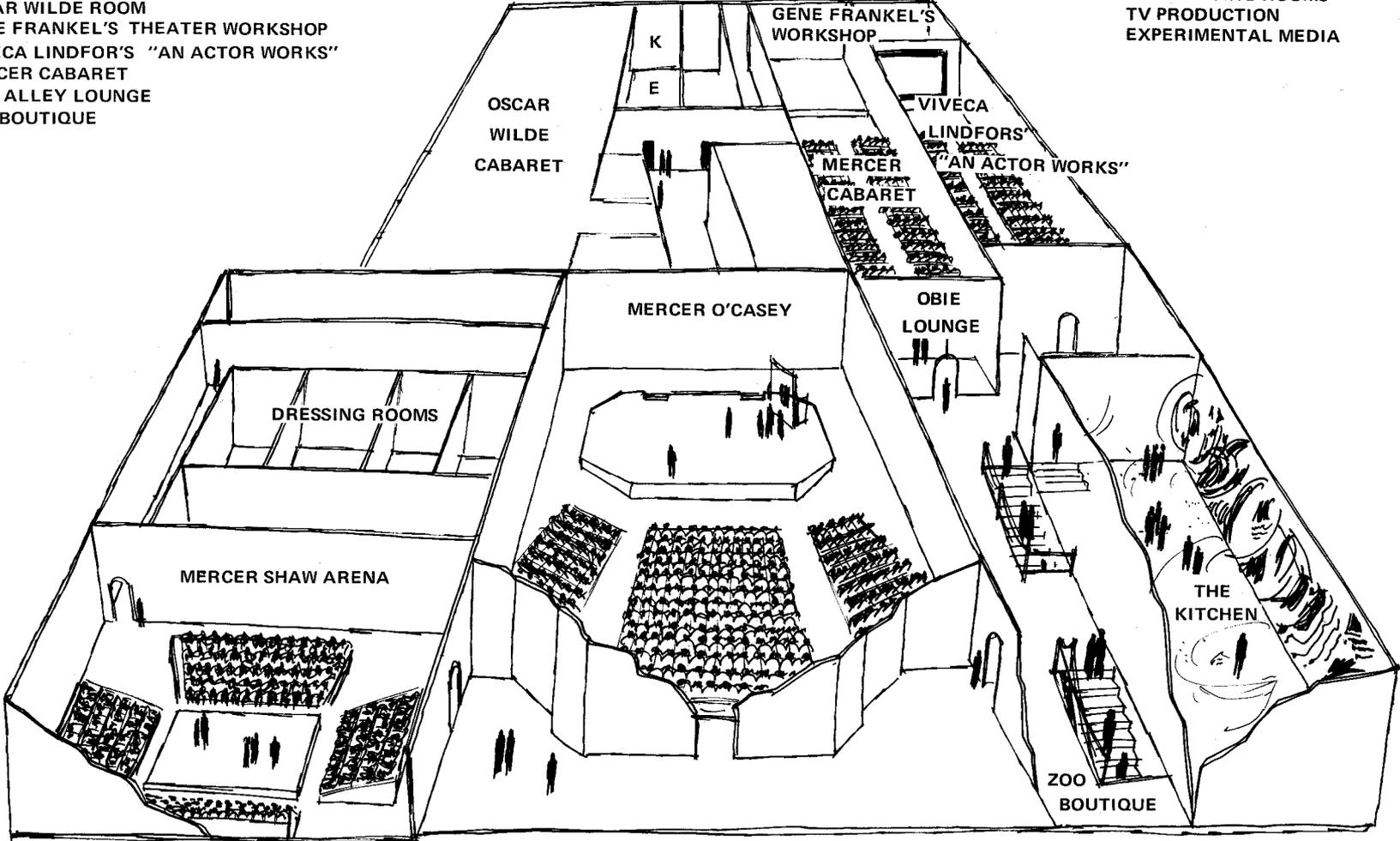
MERCER ARTS CENTER MAIN FLOOR PLAN

MERCER ARTS CENTER

SECOND FLOOR

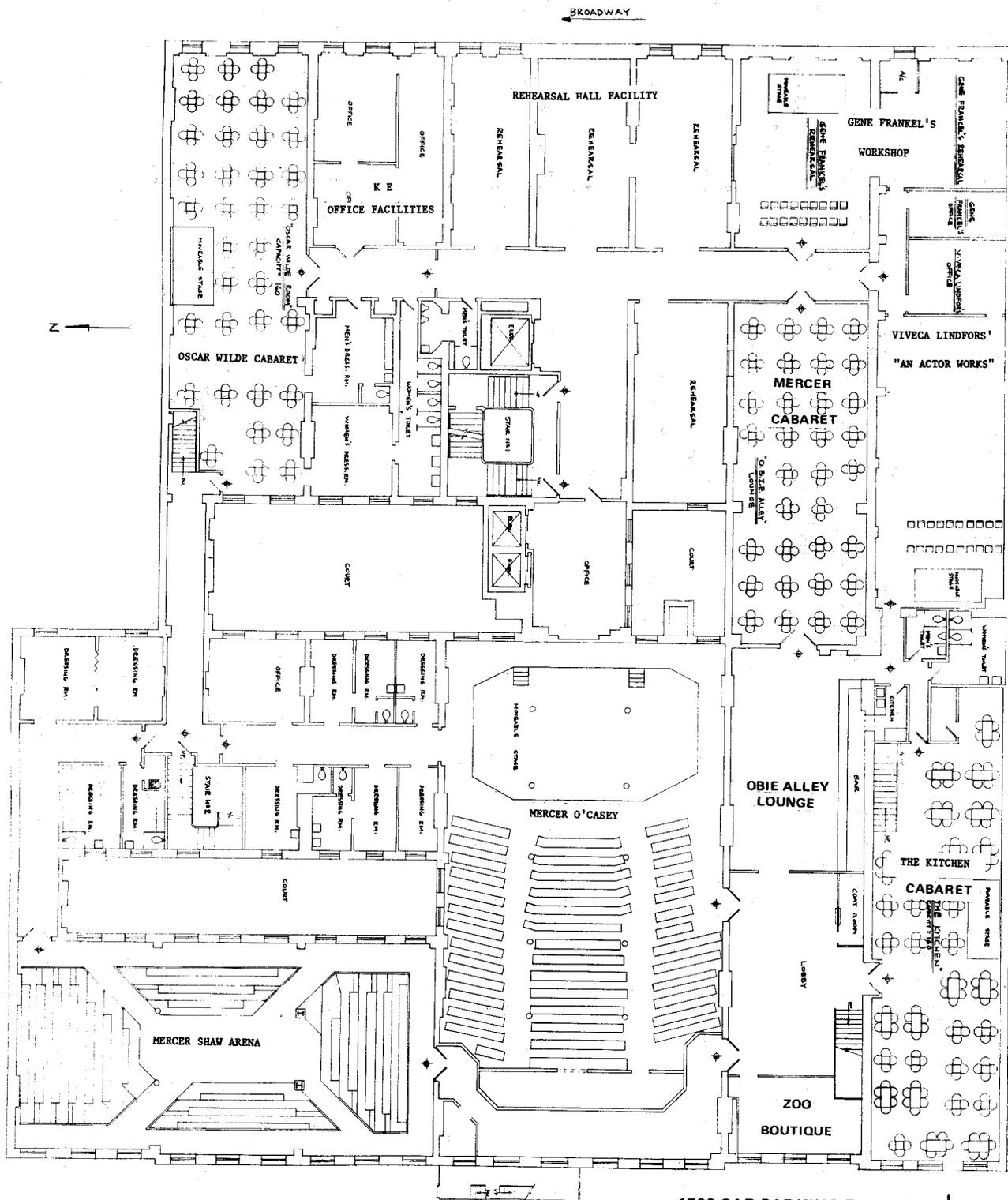
MERCER O'CASEY
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 THE KITCHEN
 OSCAR WILDE ROOM
 GENE FRANKEL'S THEATER WORKSHOP
 VIVECA LINDFOR'S "AN ACTOR WORKS"
 MERCER CABARET
 OBIE ALLEY LOUNGE
 ZOO BOUTIQUE

REHEARSAL HALL FACILITY
 OFFICE FACILITIES
 FILM EDITING ROOMS
 TV PRODUCTION
 EXPERIMENTAL MEDIA



MERCER ARTS CENTER

SECOND FLOOR



MERCER ARTS CENTER INC.
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

1500 CAR PARKING FACILITY
ACROSS STREET
WASHINGTON SQ. VILLAGE



Mercer Stages Are a Supermarket

By McCANDLISH PHILLIPS

In Greenwich Villgae, hard by a row of shipping-receiving platforms, there is one small door that leads to five Off-Broadway theaters. A flag over the entrance marks the Mercer Arts Center—a family of theaters under one roof that, until very recently, leaked.

The place, named for the street it faces, is a little north of Bleecker Street and a little east of Washington Square. Inside, theaters are jumbled and stacked together with a kind of jigsaw flair, irregular but precise in the way it fits them all together.

A year ago one of the theaters, the Mercer-O'Casey, lost a major success, "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds," when the place sprang so many leaks that the show was suspended and moved uptown. It had won the New York Drama Critics Circle award as the best American play that season, and its loss was a blow.

The 199-seat theater has been reconstructed in the last five weeks, going from a proscenium to a modified in-the-round style, and the musical "Love Me, Love My Children" opens there tomorrow night.

The center has been in a state of noisy, dust-choked excitement by day lately as work crews have torn up parts of the interior to bring them in line with the final plan, a task now more than three-quarters finished.

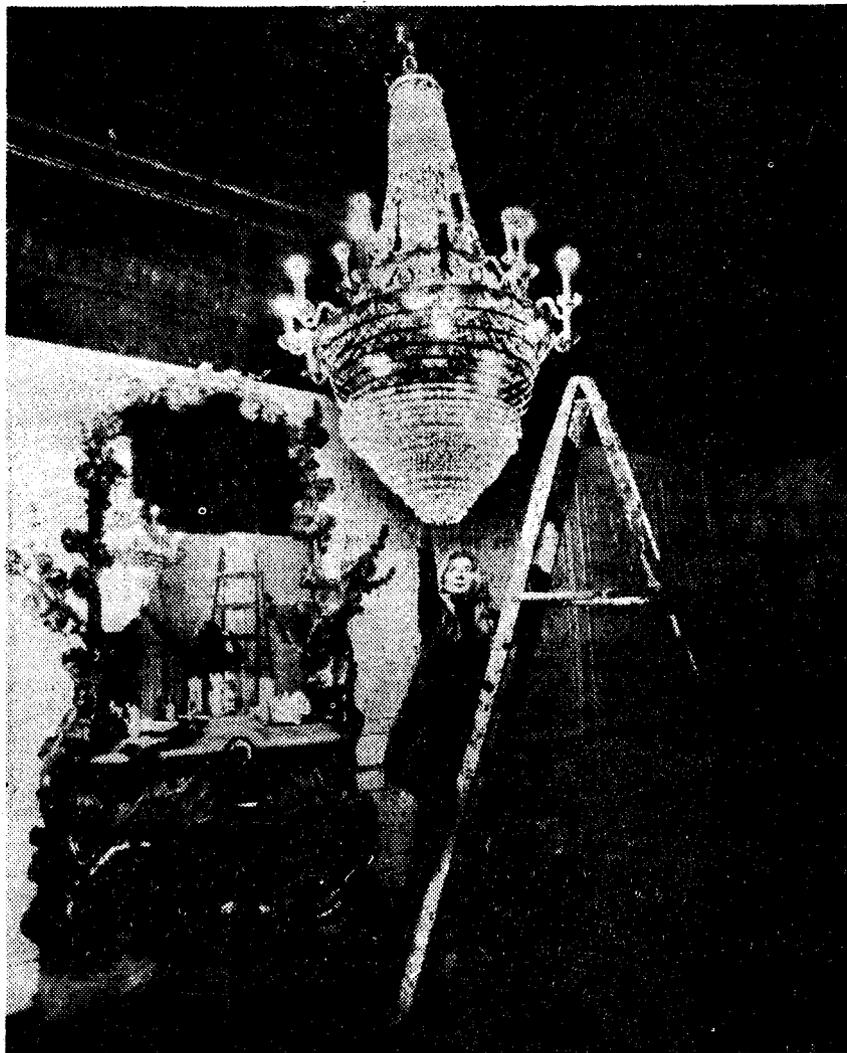
"It looks like the ruins of Troy," said Michael Tschudin, a 27-year-old musician, avoiding stepping into holes where the men had cracked the floor open to get at broken and rusted pipes.

The center's theaters are off Broadway in the narrowest sense, since the back door to all five is on Broadway. The front door is at 240 Mercer Street.

Shopping Center

The center, a kind of downtown Lincoln Center seen through the wrong end of a telescope, offers the closest thing yet to a theatrical supermarket, nicely designed for impulse buying: If you don't like one show, try another; if one is sold out, switch to others a few steps away.

The center's facilities have been fitted into, or gouged out of, a three-level slice of the University Hotel, originally the LaFarge House and



The New York Times

Dorothy Brown stringing 2,000-crystal chandelier in what is to be a rehearsal hall of the Mercer Arts Center, a family of five theaters under one roof at 240 Mercer Street.

more lately the Broadway Central Hotel.

The weight of fashion once rested upon the now largely mercantile stretches of Lower Manhattan, but fashion lifted her skirts and fled north a long time ago, leaving certain tokens behind: the chandeliers and mirrored chambers, the gorgeous marble fireplaces, the winged cupids standing in vases with which parts of the center are endowed.

"I call it Bronx Renaissance rococo," said Seymour Kaback, the center's owner-operator.

Two acting schools, those of Gene Frankel and Viveca Lindfors, occupy handsome quarters in the center.

In the corridor wheelbarrows filled with wet cement were being trundled by.

"We take care of the disasters today and the emergencies tomorrow," Mr. Kaback said. "I've got 40 men working in here—carpenters, masons, electricians, plumbers, sheet metal men, painters, carpet people. I'm making everything legal."

"This has been for about 35 years, a large catering establishment — famous-wedding-Jewish-bar mitzvahs," he said, running things all together. He spread a blueprint on his desk and counted 15 rooms on the first floor, 33 on the second floor, one in the basement—49 in all.

"We've got 35,000 square feet of space in total," he said. "Everything in this place is air-conditioned—that's my business."

Mr. Kaback, a short man with long, wiry hair that looks like Brillo, has been an air-conditioning contractor for 22 of his 49 years, and it drew him, by degrees, into show business.

"For the past 12 years I've been the silent partner with Art D'Lugoff in the Village Gate," he said. "I actually got to know him when I put the air conditioning in the place and waited two years for my money, and so we got to be very good friends."

In 1966, the Village Gate partners leased the space for

the center, and Mr. Kaback came into sole control of the enterprise last March.

"If you want to examine my motive, my motive is to make this a financial success," he said. "I'm taking a run-down, rat-ridden pestilence and making it into an oasis."

"The renovations will run about \$300,000. I'm doing it at cost because I'm doing it myself."

In his younger days he had a streak of daredevil in him, and that is why Mr. Kaback is a man with an almost posthumous perspective.

"I used to race cars, 12 years," he said. "Sports cars and midgets. Places like Watkins Glen, Sebring.

"A lot of my friends were killed. Actually I was killed once. I was pronounced dead. I'll never forget it. It was July 7, 1955, at Middletown, N. Y. I turned over, the steering wheel went through five ribs, broke a shoulder, punctured a lung. I stopped breathing."

But his mechanic tried mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in the ambulance, and Mr. Kaback started breathing again. He was out of the hospital in eight days.

"We've got 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' in the Mercer-Hansberry and 'The Proposition' in the Mercer-Shaw Arena," Mr. Kaback said. The Kitchen theater is also open, with multimedia presentations. The Oscar Wilde Cabaret Theater will be ready late this month, and a sixth theater, the Brecht, is planned.

Everything Rented

"We've always been able to rent everything we had ready, and we've turned some away," Mr. Kaback said. He estimated that the center would be taking in \$12,000 a week in rents by late November.

Mr. Kaback runs the center with a small staff. "I mix my air-conditioning people in with it, so we've got five on the staff altogether," he said.

"That room where the ceiling was coming down is going to be Obie Alley, with booths à la Sardi's along the walls," Mr. Kaback continued. "We'll have pre-theater and after-theater dining there by December."

How did Mr. Kaback see his relationship to Lincoln Center? "Any analogy I make would be pretentious or derogatory," he said. "I won't say derogatory for whom."

NIGHT OWL reporter

Theaters by the Bunch

"I wonder what's going on down there?" a friend commented last week, referring to the theater complex known as the Mercer Arts Center. Her question had a tinge of what pianists for silent movies used to call a *misterioso* theme.

In the blaring light of a party given to introduce the center to a selected public Monday night, there was nothing mysterious at all, however. It was evident that this is a calculated attempt to make art work under the mantle of commerce, and who is to say that's wrong? Art has enough trouble sustaining itself. It can use any help it can get.

The Mercer Arts Center contains three theaters which have been in operation since last year, the Mercer-Hansberry, Mercer-O'Casey and Mercer-Shaw, two new ones to be opened soon, the Mercer-Brecht and Oscar Wilde Cabaret, and four new operations which just began-functioning, the Kitchen videotape theater, Obie Alley cocktail lounge, DMZ Lounge night club and Zoo boutique. The center is on Mercer St. in Greenwich Village, between Third and Bleecker Sts.

Seymour Kaback, who describes himself as "president-secretary-treasurer" of Mercer Art Center Inc., was moving among the guests with beamish pride in his enterprise written on his face. He was a

standout figure with his fashionably long graying hair, moustache and beard and a knit black jump suit with vest and belt, decorated in three-dimensional gold designs. Asked if any grants or funds are involved, he shot back, "This is funded by private capital and we are going to make it into a viable business and not be beholden to the city. Every enterprise pays rent."

The project began as Theater Cabaret Inc., with Kaback and Art and Burt D'Lugoff of the Village Gate as partners, but the D'Lugoffs dropped out and the project became Mercer Art Center under a new lease. Contractor Irving Koven now is listed as co-owner of the Center with Kaback.

Kaback is an air-conditioning engineer and he continues to operate that business from new offices in the center. "I'm not a typical-looking engineer," he said, "but I happen to be a good one. Where do you think all the bread comes from?" In case you're questioning the validity of a clothing boutique as an art form, its proprietor, Dorothy Brown, is a former business associate of Kaback's and a boutique is as much an art form as a bar.



NEWS photo by Richard Corkery

Splendor of Seymour Kaback's outfit is matched by mirrored fireplace and chandelier, relics of hotel's former glory.

There is one temporary tenant in the center, the Elizabeth Cleaners Street School, an "alternative" high school of about 20 pupils named after the storefront in which it first met. A book on the project called "Starting Your Own High School" will be published by Random House in the spring.

Most of the invited visitors to the open house seemed content to stay in Obie Alley, named after the Village Voice off-Broadway awards, where free drinks and food were being dispensed, but others circulated into the rooms at the rear in various stages of renovation. These include Kaback's offices and rehearsal spaces for acting schools, which will be directed by pros like Viveca Lindfors, Gene Frankel, Rip Torn and Geraldine Page.

Off the corridor there also is an elevator with a steel gate which can be drawn across it and locked. The Mercer Arts Center occupies the two lower back floors of the former welfare hotel, Broadway Central. The rooms under renovation are former public rooms in the hotel and the elevator services tenants still living in the hotel's 300 or so rooms.

Maurice, who goes by his first name only, strolled along with Kaback into his offices. Maurice is a familiar figure in Greenwich Village, peddling books and art work in the streets, and his full white beard and long white hair and well-worn clothes contrasted with Kaback's hip appearance. "I've been around since 1916, 1917," Maurice reminisced. "I have some wonderful old books on the Village. You know, I should write a book."

Back in the Obie Alley area, a young woman was leading a male companion through the reconversion splendors. "Remember the broken-down toilets? It's really gorgeous now," she said as she pulled open a men's room door to illustrate, revealing gleaming white tile and a male occupant.

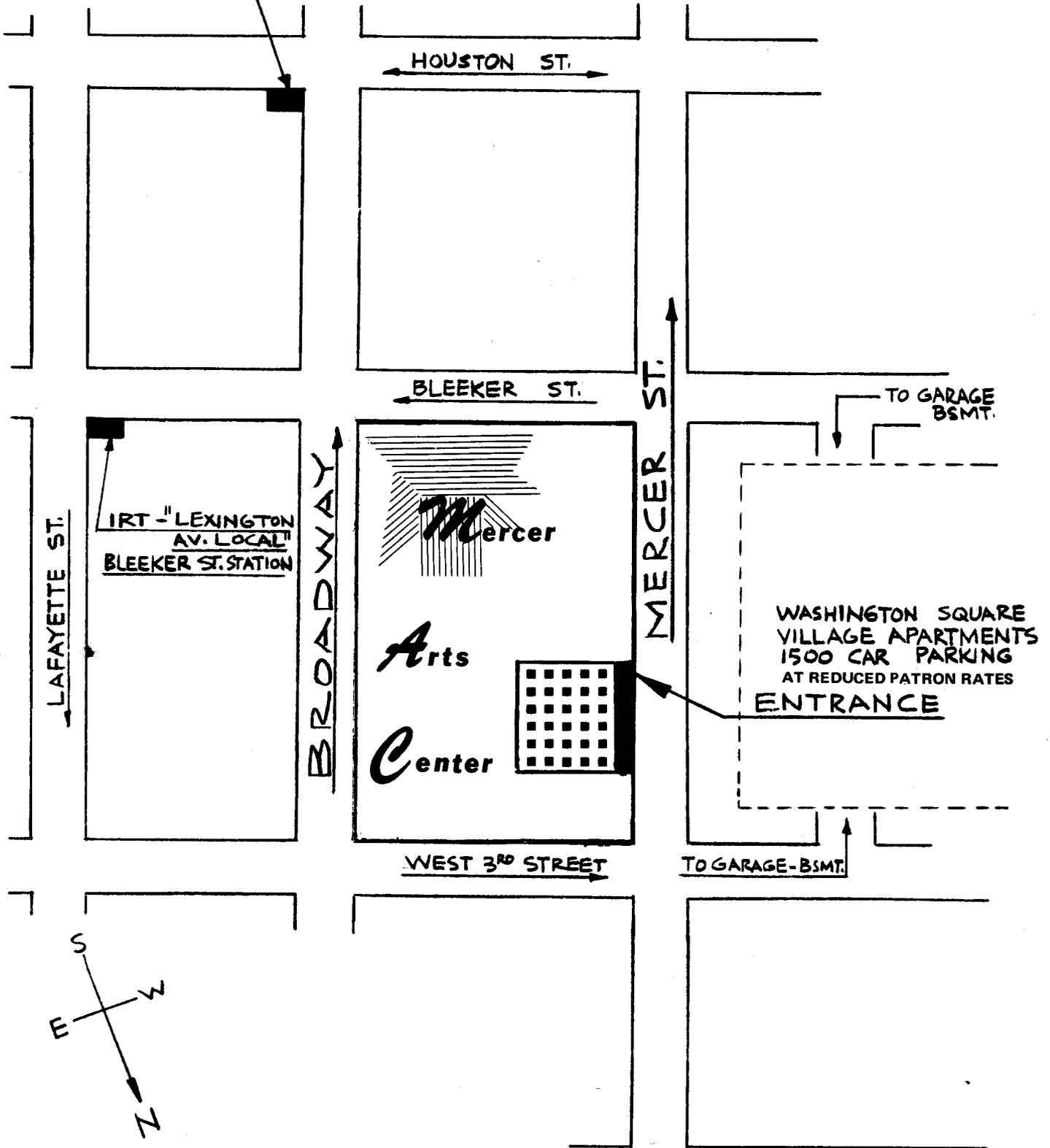
For anyone who walked outside and around the corner to 673 Broadway, the vein of contrast continued. There a laconic red-and-white sign on a marquee, "UNIVERSITY," announces the Broadway Central's new name. Two men standing beneath it were splitting a bottle of wine. But entering the theaters from Mercer St., you won't have to encounter scenes like that.

—ERNEST LEGRANDE

THE CALENDAR

Mercer lineup at present is: "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" at the Hansberry, "Love Me, Love My Children" at the O'Casey, "The Proposition" musical revue at the Shaw and DMZ political satire cabaret in the DMZ Lounge. Phone for all: 673-3937. DMZ is Friday through Sunday only. The Kitchen has electronic music concerts 8 p.m. Mondays. For its other programs call 475-9865.

IND "F" TRAIN (BROADWAY-HOUSTON STATION)



IND "ALL TRAINS" (WEST 4TH ST. STATION) & 6TH AVE.

mercer arts center