

# UPSTAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
AT ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY • JUNE 2001

# MAJOR BARBARA



**New insights into  
George Bernard  
Shaw's classic  
masterwork by the  
artists who created  
the Roundabout  
production**



# Shaw:

## The Director's Perspective

by Daniel Sullivan

### Power and Control

ALTHOUGH *MAJOR BARBARA* WAS WRITTEN A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, I think that the issues in the play are issues that are very important today. George Bernard Shaw is dealing with the issues of what power means in the world. He looks at how money makes the world go 'round. He looks at how "we are all one," which sounds sort of like a late twentieth-century co-opting of eastern religion. In fact, it was Shaw's belief that we are all responsible for both the good and the evil in the world, and that there was no separating good from evil. Because we all pay taxes, because every action in the world is linked to some other action, we have to take responsibility for what goes on in the world. That's really what the play is about: it's about how you use the power that you have as a human being.

### Then and Now

THERE WAS A GROUP CALLED THE FABIAN SOCIETY IN ENGLAND, which Shaw was a member of, and the Fabian Society was grappling with the questions of: how do we live in the world, and how do we organize society. Shaw was very tired of the meetings that he would go to where people would just talk, and he was very anxious that some action be taken.

So many huge incidents have occurred since the writing of this play: the First and Second World Wars, the killing of six million Jews, the Vietnam War. The capacity for destruction has really been brought forward, and what's interesting is that, in some way, it hasn't destroyed the edifice of this play. The issues are still there before us. Man has not learned how to deal with the power to destroy, and that's one of Shaw's points. Shaw says you can't deal with life until you've dealt with this power to destroy. Since the collapse of Communism, the utopian idea that Shaw had has been shown to be a failure, and yet we still have to solve the problem. There are still millions of poor people in this country. There are still huge inequities in our society. The organization of society is what he was grappling with. How do you organize it in such a way that it is fair? And we have not figured that out.

It's one of those plays that changes with the times, to some degree. It was written at a time that is similar to ours, in that the British empire was basically at peace, and yet a ruler of the world,

**Shaw says  
you can't  
deal with life  
until you've  
dealt with  
this power to  
destroy.**

## UPSTAGE

CONTRIBUTORS

**MARGARET  
SALVANTE-McCANN**  
Education Director

**PHILIP A. ALEXANDER**  
Education Program Manager

**MEGAN WALTZ**  
Education Assistant

**MELODY JOHNSON  
JEREMY LEWIT**  
Education Interns

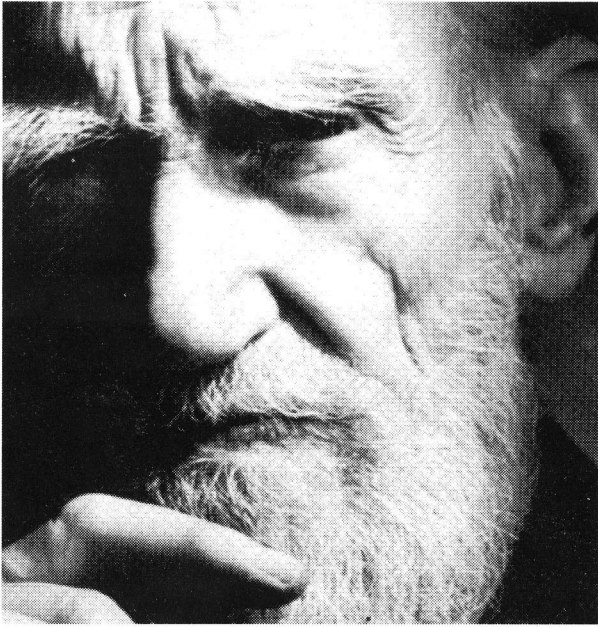
**TIM McCANNA**  
Design

**COVER:**  
Illustration by Scott McKowen

**ROUNDABOUT  
THEATRE COMPANY**  
231 West 39th Street  
Suite 1200  
New York, NY 10018  
telephone: 212.719.9393  
fax: 212.869.8817  
[www.roundabouttheatre.org](http://www.roundabouttheatre.org)

Copyright © 2001  
Roundabout Theatre Company, Inc.  
All rights reserved.

Continued on page 2

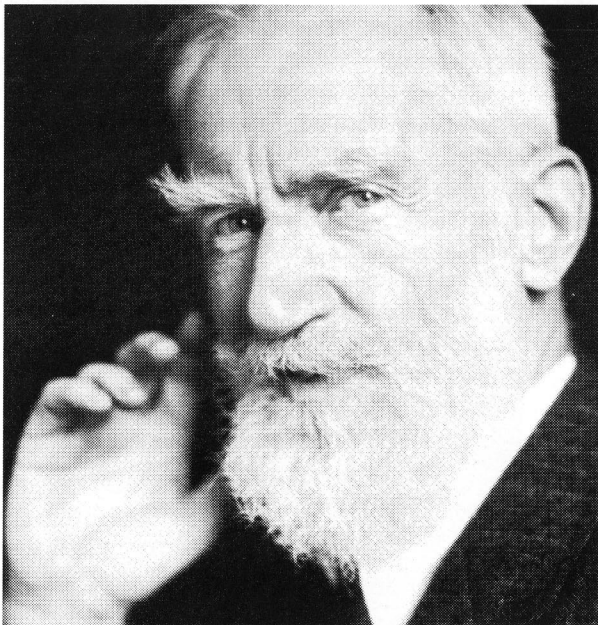


**He would see us less as individuals and more as this monolithic culture that is being sedated by the noise and the signage around us.**

**Continued from page 1**

very much like this country is today. The leading character in the play is a manufacturer of weapons, and of course, today the U.S. of A. is the largest maker of weapons and seller of weapons in the world.

I think Shaw would look at the world today and see a society that has become somewhat numbed to action, that has in some way sort of become the slaves of the corporate culture; a society that watches the stock market, whose national temperament goes from despair to exultation depending upon how the stock figures go. He would see us less as individuals and more as this monolithic culture that is being sedated by the noise and the signage around us.



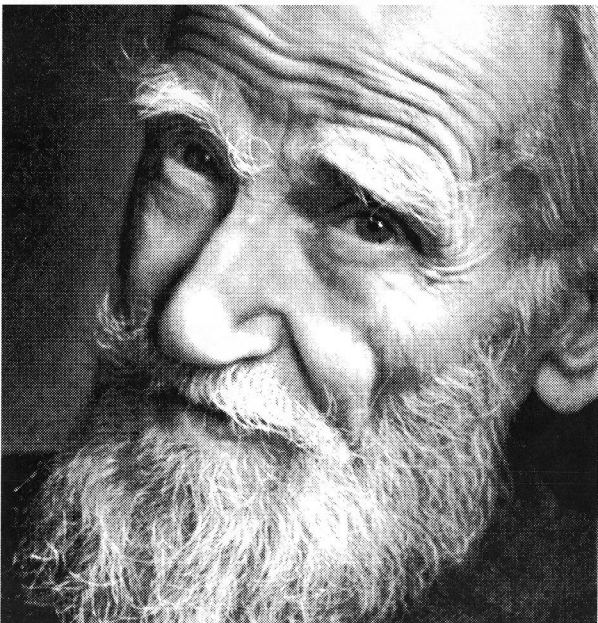
### **Undershaft**

SHAW IS VERY INTERESTED IN THE CHARACTER OF THE DEVIL. In so many of his plays, there is an old gentleman--I always assume it's someone close to Shaw himself--who says the most outrageous things, and in some ways, the most contemptible things. They're also the most inarguable things. He puts these things in a very strong argument for the use of money, of power, into the mouth of a munitions manufacturer, who you think would be a most reprehensible character. Undershaft wins you over with the strength of his argument, as he wins over the people in the play, his own daughter being one of them--his own daughter being someone who has been recently converted by the Salvation Army and is in great opposition to her father and to the evil she feels he does.

### **Barbara**

UNDERSHAFT COMES TO BARBARA'S SHELTER AND SHOWS HER THAT HE CAN BASICALLY BUY THE SALVATION ARMY, and it sort of destroys Barbara's faith in the Salvation Army and in organized religion. She realizes that some of her life has been a response against her class, against the nobility of her birth, and she's gone to the Salvation Army to save the poor. In fact, she realizes that if she's going to do real good in the world, she has to save healthy, middle class creatures whose bodies have already been fed and whose minds are available to her.

Barbara is a woman of action; she wants to save souls and she is obsessed with this. It takes that kind of proactive thing in life, what Shaw calls the life-force, which is really the force to change life. Feeding the poor, though that's necessary, is not going to ultimately solve the problem. It's finding a way for the poor not to be poor, that you're not just putting a band-aid on. If you're fixing the wounds, find a way for the wounds not to occur. ■



**Daniel Sullivan's current directing credits include the Broadway production of *Proof* and the off-Broadway production of *Dinner with Friends*.**



# Barbara:

## The Actor's Perspective

by Cherry Jones

### Barbara's Character

BARBARA IS AN UTTER IDEALIST WHO BECOMES A REALIST, willing to accept her God's ultimate challenge. She believes in the evil and goodness of man and the ability to transform. I find her deeply sincere. She does not participate in that English custom of using irony almost constantly. She finds it superfluous. She doesn't judge it, it's just superfluous to what matters.

### Barbara's Journey

SHE SAYS AT THE SPINE OF THIS PLAY, "MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?" And her faith, momentarily, is shaken to its core. It's her father—who she does perceive, certainly at one point in the play, as the devil himself—who reminds her of her faith. She finds that God works through this man, and we are reminded of our faith and therefore challenged in the most extraordinary, unlikely ways.

### On Acting

BARBARA IS DESCRIBED AS DIVINE, AS BOSSY, AND AS A LUNATIC. There are many wonderful contradictions Shaw gives you about Barbara. They're road signs, which [as an actor] gives you a lot of leeway. I don't have to go out there and play divine. I can go out there and play, among other things, a divine, bossy lunatic.

In the moment of spiritual euphoria that Barbara experiences at the end of the play, I have to absolutely be transported. I must find the emotional spring board to achieve such a heightened state each performance.

### Making sense of the play

IF YOU DON'T GO ALONG FOR THE RIDE WITH THIS, YOU REALLY MIGHT AS WELL STAY AT HOME. The costumes will be gorgeous and the set will be stunning, but the ideas you must be sharp and rested for.

One brilliant thing about the play is that you find yourself at time buying into Undershaft's persuasive reasoning. You almost feel comfortable buying into his reasoning, and remember: it's a socialist Shaw arguing so persuasively for the standard, conservative, hawkish ideology.

I went home and I started feeling like I was getting a handle

on the play, and then I woke up and read about the atrocity in Israel, where this twenty-one year old boy took a bomb into a mall and managed to blow himself up and a few other innocents (I think he was an innocent as well). God knows what his childhood must have been like. He was whipped up into a place of hatred, where, as a twenty-one year old, he was ready to sacrifice his life for this greater cause. And I just started thinking of the people who made the shrapnel that ripped the bodies of everyone around him, and I got so angry at this play again.

You have to remember that we're meant to be angry and disturbed and made to feel intensely uncomfortable with those parts of the play that we start to find ourselves agreeing with. We're not supposed to walk out of this play going, "By God, he's right." Well, maybe you are, for the first hour of your trip home. But when you get there, you're supposed to go, "Wait a minute, whoa. He's not!"

**In the moment of spiritual euphoria that Barbara experiences at the end of the play, I have to absolutely be transported.**

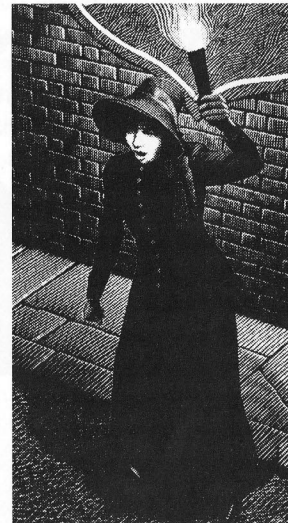


Illustration: Scott McKowen

### Shaw

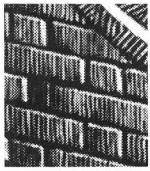
SHAW WAS A SOCIALIST COMEDIAN, COMING OUT OF THE AGE OF THE GREAT ORATOR. I wish we still had the tradition of the orator, be it religious or political, but the true orator who would make the circuit and play all the little lecture halls throughout the country. That tradition is, of course, where Shaw comes from, and you feel that in the

writing. It's very declamatory, but very funny at the same time. He can keep people in their seats for two and a half hours, because he knows how to throw outrageous curve balls, which, as a socialist political writer, makes him stand apart from the rest of the crowd.

### Inspiration

I LOVE PLAYS THAT HAVE HOPE IN THEM. Either the character has hope or there's a greater hope for society and that we're not alone. With this play, people will go home, probably muttering and sputtering and saying, "What the hell is that play about?" But hopefully they'll keep sorting through it with their loved ones who saw it with them, and have fascinating conversations about it. If *Major Barbara* doesn't inspire conversation, no play will. ■

Cherry Jones' acting credits include the Roundabout Theatre Company production of *The Night of the Iguana* ('95).



# Buildings: The Set Designer's Perspective

by John Lee Beatty

WE DECIDED TO SET THE PLAY IN WHAT MOST PEOPLE WILL PROBABLY CONSIDER A REALISTIC FORMAT, even though I don't think realism actually exists in the theatre. Theatre lives on a more intense level; I mean, no one in real life can talk or be as intense as Shaw's characters are on stage.

Certain things have changed in stagecraft, in the way we put shows on stage today. We're trying to get away from the antique approach of backdrops and canvas flats and all of that, which have an ambiguity to us now. If we had a backdrop of the West Ham shelter in Act II, to us that says something about artificiality, but someone in 1907 wouldn't look at it that way. They would just say, "Oh, it's supposed to be a street." We have a more sophisticated visual language, but on the other hand, looking backward at an older play, we have forgotten so much. Back when the play was first produced, they knew exactly what they were looking at, but we didn't live then, so we've tried to clarify the character's behaviors through the scenery.

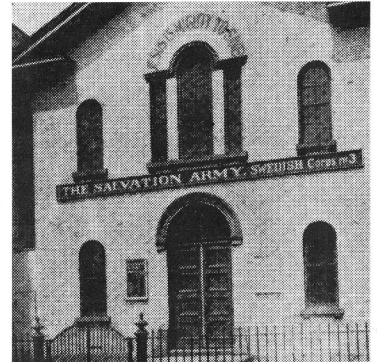
Shaw wasn't writing a period piece, so a production of *Major Barbara* shouldn't feel like an antique. Shaw is making a contrast between old order and the new. It's important to get that clear, so you need a completely contemporary way of being accurate for now and accurate for then at the same time. Although we followed Shaw's descriptions, each scene has been slightly changed or at least has evolved into something today's audience can understand more clearly. The geographical layout of 1906 upper-class houses is not one of our strongest suits, but I think audiences will understand Lady Britomart's home because it's sort of a Gramercy Park fantasy of how we'd like to live now. We should feel that Barbara's Salvation Army shelter is in a depressed area with poor people, so I tried to think equal parts London

**In a building, I think you can see the aspirations of a society.**

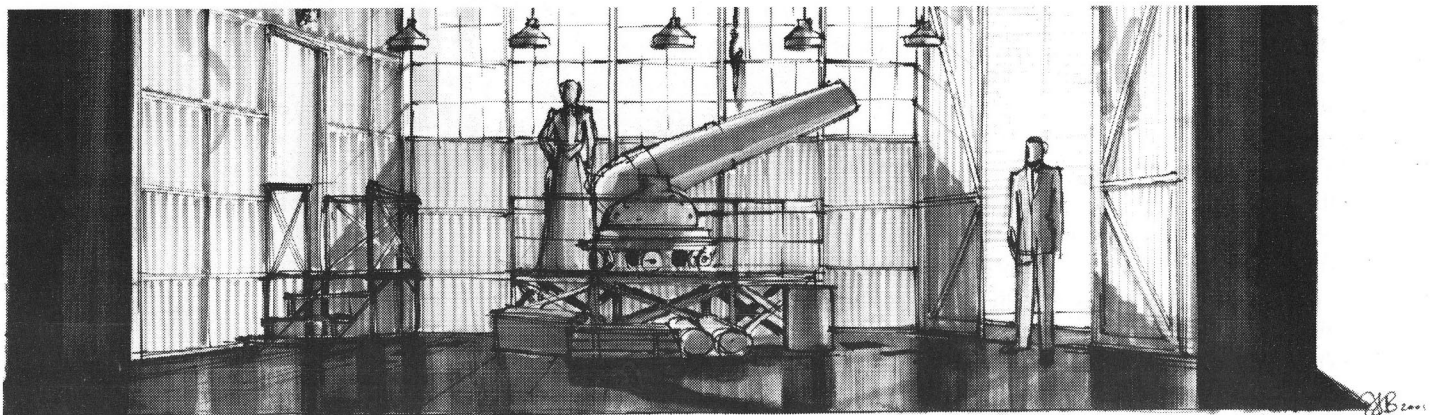
East End and the South Bronx, something that resonated. Undershaft's factory is more of a dream of a factory than an actual one, since it's supposed to be an idealized community.

In a building, I think you can see the aspirations of a society. I happened to be working in Stratford, Canada, and I realized I was looking at a building built the same year the play was written. I stared at it, trying to get an insight about how people felt when that building was new. You can tell from the proportion of the doors and windows how they thought people should look and move, and what degree of classicism was appropriate to their lives and how much space they needed for their activities. In that same way, there is a visual story to our production that you see told in the amount of air, space and light in each setting. You'll see the compression of space within Lady Britomart's library and the way people have to move there: the characters can't twirl around at will in that scene. They even talk about it-- how in that household they're caught in certain roles that they can't get out of. Compare that to the way the characters can move in the more expansive Salvation Army shelter or the factory. ■

John Lee Beatty has also designed sets for Roundabout productions including *The Father* ('95), *Anna Christie* ('93) and *The Price* ('92).



Old Brooklyn No. 3 Corp, opened in 1887. From *Marching to Glory: The History of the Salvation Army*, '1980 by The Salvation Army.



"MAJOR BARBARA"

UNDERSHAFT'S MANUFACTORY



# Uniforms:

## The Costume Designer's Perspective

by Jane Greenwood

SHAW REALLY MAKES YOU THINK. He isn't writing for entertainment or visual effects. He's writing about people, and the story develops through the characters of the people in the play. I look at those people and their time and world to create the feeling of character in what they wear.

To design a Shaw play, you have to love history. The Salvation Army museum was very kind and sent a lot of photographs. It was tremendously helpful to see pictures of real people in those uniforms. It creates such a different feeling to see the reality. You realize that these women were very involved in social works, and quite often they were from good families. I have a picture from 1902 of the St. Bartholomew's Sixpenny Charity. Even though they are poor people, they manage to make themselves look somewhat presentable within the framework of the fashion of the time, and with very little money. It's interesting how human nature always goes to look at the silhouette and wants to achieve it in some way, however modestly.

Unlike today, people's attire was so much about time and place. Now you can put on a black pair of pants, tee shirt and jacket and go right through to the end of the day. Back then, clothing denoted events, time and social

**Back then,  
clothing denoted  
events, time and  
social position.**

position. Lady Britomart's dress for dinner would be very different from the dress she wore to visit in the morning. When Barbara wears her uniform and when she doesn't is important. In the first scene, we have Adolphus in his Salvation

Army uniform to show that he is totally enamoured with the idea of becoming part of the Army. Undershaft is in tails, which was very much *de rigueur* for going to your club in the evening. The two young men, Lomax and Stephen, are in the tuxedos of the time, which were a little more modern and for younger men to wear. That gives us a visual difference in age also, which is helpful.

It's very important to talk to the actor and director about these choices, because they are so important to the character. We'll all look at a sketch and talk a little bit about how people will react. Early in rehearsal, for example, the actor playing the butler, Morrison, decided he had been with the family a very long time. We thought his livery could be sort of comfortable and old and well used. To age him, we thought of making made his costume a little larger, so that he's sort of shrunken, with shoulders slumped a little bit. Although this concept was later changed, conversations like that are helpful, because when the costumes visualize the characters' stories, the audience unconsciously knows who the characters are before they say anything. ■

Jane Greenwood has designed costumes for Roundabout productions including *The Deep Blue Sea* ('98), *A Month in the Country* ('95) and *She Loves Me* ('93).



Top & bottom: Typical turn-of-the-century Salvation Army uniforms. From *The Hallelujah Army*, '1961 by Harry Edward Neal.



# Activities:

## Discovering Your Own Perspective

**Think** about who controls your life. Think about the responsibilities you have in this world. As Barbara says, when she talks about the powerful corporate interests, "they build our churches for us," and "if we decided not to go into their churches, then we have to kneel on the stones of the streets they pave." What we touch so often has to do with other people's constructions that we use and pay for. This was before the age of advertisement, but it's very much about marketing, how people sell us things constantly.

– Director Daniel Sullivan

### Before the Play

**Investigate** how corporations have a role in your life. What company logos do you find on your clothing, for example? Do you find yourself buying the same products, say fast food or candy? Make a list of the different companies you patronize regularly, and rank them in terms of their influence on your lifestyle.

**Explore** how different environments affect the people in them. For example, compare how people interact on a subway platform and on a subway train. Do the different spaces change the people's behavior? Notice how the dining room in a restaurant is set up differently from the dining room in a person's home. What do these spaces, their decoration, and the furniture in them tell us about the people who use them?

**Observe** how people reveal their character through clothing. In a place with a lot of people, see how their attire is similar and different from one another. What can you tell about the environment or the season from their clothing? For instance, are they wearing boots or sandals? How does their dress reflect social position?

### During the Play

**Listen** for the issues that control the characters. Do they say if they're influenced by an idea, a company or a person?

Do their actions seem to actually follow this ideal, or is something else the real root of their motivations?

**Observe** how the characters respond to their setting. Do you see them acting differently when they are inside versus when they are outside? How does the size of the space or the type of furniture change their behavior?

**Watch** for the changes in the characters' clothing. How are the costumes similar to one another and how are they different? Do you see any similarity between the attire of the period and clothes of today?

### After the Play

**Research** corporations on the internet. Most companies have websites that describe their corporate philosophy and community programs. Do the companies you patronize support social causes you're interested in? Do you feel they are making positive contributions to our society? What actions could you take to share your views about such companies and their practices?

**Create** a new environment. Using a few pieces of furniture (a chair or two, a small table, a lamp, etc.), make different arrangements that reflect different ideas. For instance, what would you do to create a very private, personal space? Now how would you use the same items to create an environment that is more open and public?

**Design** period costumes. Choose a historical period that's interesting to you--it could be as far back as the ancient Romans or as recent as the 1970s--and then create costumes for people of different social and economic backgrounds in that period. You'll need to do some research, like looking at old magazines, watching films made about that time, or surfing the web for pictures. Show your designs to a friend or family member and ask them what they can tell about the character's social and economic position. Or send them to Roundabout, and we'll share them with people who work on our production of *Major Barbara*! ■

Send your ideas to Roundabout Theatre Company, Attention: UPSTAGE, 231 West 39th Street, Suite 1200, New York, NY 10018.

# When you get to the Theatre:

## Ticket Policy

As a student participant in *Page To Stage* or *Theatre Access*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

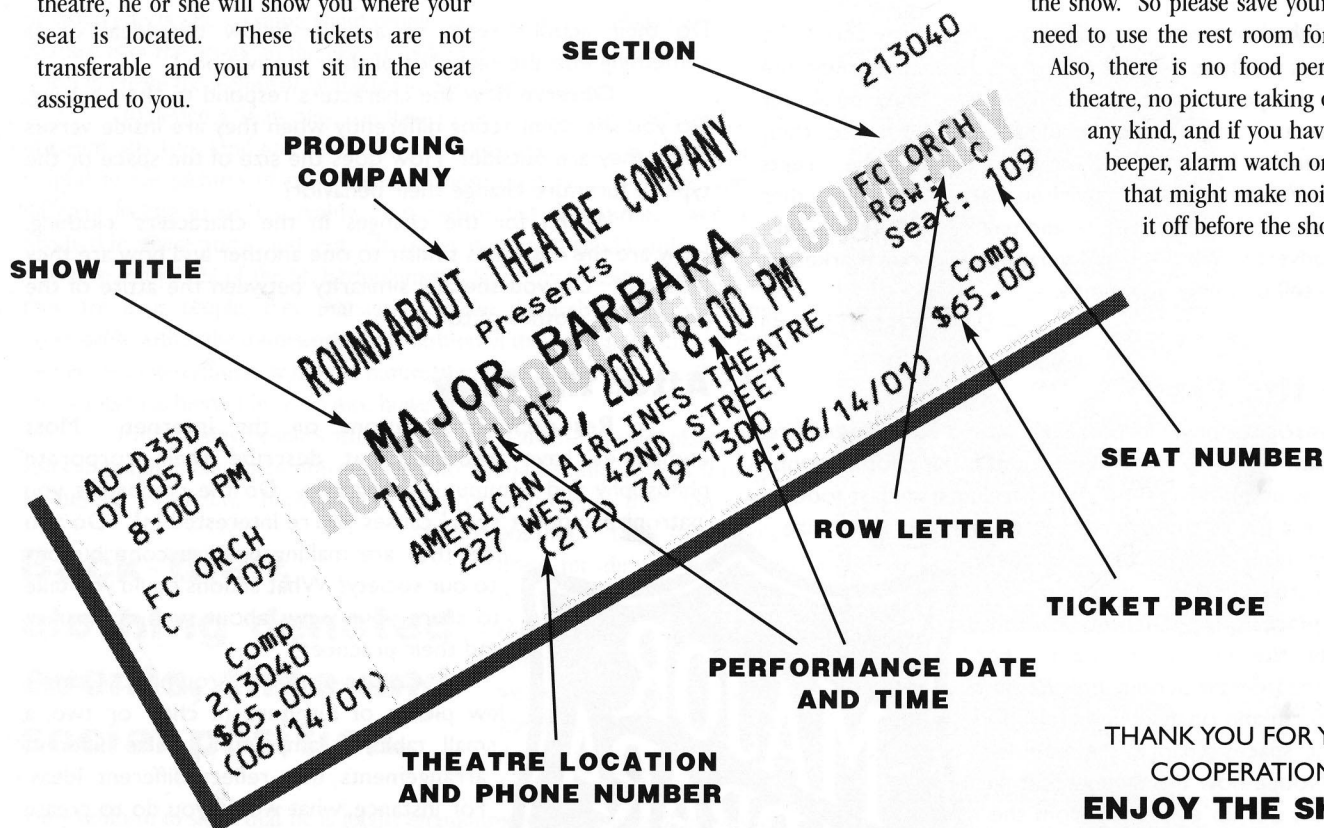
## Programs

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the Who's Who section, for example, you can read about the actors roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

## Audience Etiquette

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission.

Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



## ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR EDUCATION PROGRAM:

Axe-Houghton Foundation  
 Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation  
 The Louis Calder Foundation  
 Citigroup  
 Consolidated Edison Company of New York  
 The Samuel and Rae Eckman Charitable Foundation  
 The Educational Foundation of America  
 The Heckscher Foundation for Children  
 HSBC Bank USA

IBM Corporation  
 Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation  
 JP Morgan Chase  
 The McGraw-Hill Companies  
 Merrill Lynch & Co. Foundation, Inc.  
 National Endowment for the Arts  
 Newman's Own  
 New York City Department of Cultural Affairs  
 The New York Community Trust

New York Foundation for the Arts  
 New York State Council on the Arts  
 PepsiCo Foundation  
 The Rudin Foundation  
 S.H. and Helen R. Scheuer Family Foundation  
 Spektor Family Foundation  
 The Michael Tuch Foundation, Inc.  
 Verizon Foundation  
 Anonymous