

MIKE NUSSBAUM MORE THAN A LEGEND

Speech given at Northlight Theatre Chicago to honor one of Chicago's great actors

PRINCE'S TO ACT

WAS THERE A GREATER PRINCE OF THE THEATER THAN THIS GREAT ARTIST? THE FIRST WORK WE COLLABORATED ON WAS JACK GELBER'S "THE CONNECTION" HE PROBABLY THOUGHT I CAST HIM IN THE ROLE OF THE JEWISH PHILOSOPHER BECAUSE HE WAS JEWISH. NO, THE REASON I CAST HIM ; HE WAS ONE OF THE MOST INTELLIGENT ACTOR I EVER MET AND THE CHARACTER WAS THE THE MOST INTELLIGENT CHARACTER IN THE PLAY. AND I JUST LOVED THE DELICIOUS IDEA THAT HERE WAS AN UPSTANDING EXECUTIVE [SQUARE] MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY, WITH AN EXTERMINATING BUSINESS PLAYING A STREETWISE JUNKIE. ANN LANDER AFTER SEEING HIM PERFORM COULDN'T BELIEVE HER EYES AND SWORE WE HAD HIRED A JUNKIE TO THE PLAY THE PART. THIS WAS OUR INTRODUCTION TO THE MAGIC OF MIKE'S GENIUS FOR CREATING A ROLE. THAT AUDIENCES OF MILLIONS ALL OVER THE WORLD HAVE ENJOYED.

I THINK HE DID GET THE BUG TO PLAY TO MILLIONS WHEN HE WAS INTRODUCED TO PLAYING GOLDBERG IN "THE BIRTHDAY PARTY' IN THAT HUGE BARN OF A THEATER IN RAVINIA. AS THE AUDIENCE OF A THOUSAND HUNG ON TO EVER QUIET WORD HE SPOKE. IT WAS DURING THE REHEARSAL HERE THAT I GOT THE FIRST WOUND FROM MIKE WHICH I STILL HOLD CLOSE TO MY HEART. IN A MOMENT OF FRUSTRATION HE THREW THE SCRIPT AT ME . IT COULD HAVE BEEN THE HEAT OF REHEARSING IN THE SUN OUT IN THE BOWL OR I LIKE TO THINK THAT IT WAS THAT WE HAD COME TO A MOMENT WHERE WE TRUSTED EACH OTHER AND COULD BE FREE WITH OUR EMOTIONS. WE HAD TRULY BONDED THAT HOT AFTERNOON AND I HAVE TREASURED THAT BOND TO THIS DAY.

I ALWAYS REFERRED MIKE AND THE WONDERFUL ACTRESS PAT TERRY WHO PLAYED IN MANY PLAY TOGETHER AS HULL HOUSE'S LUNT AND FONTAINE. BUT THE REAL LIFE FONTAINE TO HIS LUNT WA HIS WIFE ANNETTE WHO WAITED PATIENTLY AT EVERY PERFORMANCE IN THEHULL HOOUSE LOBBY FOR HER HUSBAND TO WALK IN AND AND CHEER HIM ON TO ANOTHER GREAT PERFORM ANCE. THEY SAY THERE'S ALWAYS A GREAT WOMAN BEHIND EVERY GREAT MAN. ANNETTE WAS THAT GREAT WOMAN.

MY GREATEST HONOR MIKE BESTOWED ON ME WAS TO ATTEND ONE OF THE FINAL REHEARSALS OF MY MUSICAL O PIONEERS IN MY NEW YORK APARTMENT. THE CAST THRILLED TO GIVE A COMMAND PERFORMANCE TO THIS PRINCE OF THE THEATER. BEING TOGETHER THAT NIGHT THE YEARS DISSAPEARED AND WE WERE YOUNG AGAIN TRANSPORTED TO THE OLD DAYS OF HULL HOUSE

MONARCHS TO BEHOLD THE SWELLING SCENE

THE PART OF HIS CAREER THAT I MISSED MOST WAS THE GREATNESS THAT HE ACHIEVED AS A DIRECTOR. FROM CHICAGO CAME REPORTS THAT THE THE SAME HONESTY AND TALENT HE BROUGHT TO HIS ACTING HE BROUGHT TO HIS DIRECTING.

I COULD GO ON AND ON WITH FABULOUS STORIES AND MY LOVE FOR THIS PRINCE AND MONARCH. BUT KNOWING I WAS ONE OF THE WINDIEST GUYS EVER IN THE WINDY CITY THEY ASKED ME TO CUT DOWN MY SPEECH. SO LET'S TAKE OF OUR HATS AND THROW OUR CAPES OVER OUR SHOULDERS AND BOW TO THIS PRINCE AND MONARCH OF THE THEATER. NOW THAT YOU'RE A LEGEND I PRAY YOU DON'T TAKE TO POSING FOR THOSE ADS IN LONG BLACK FUR COATS.