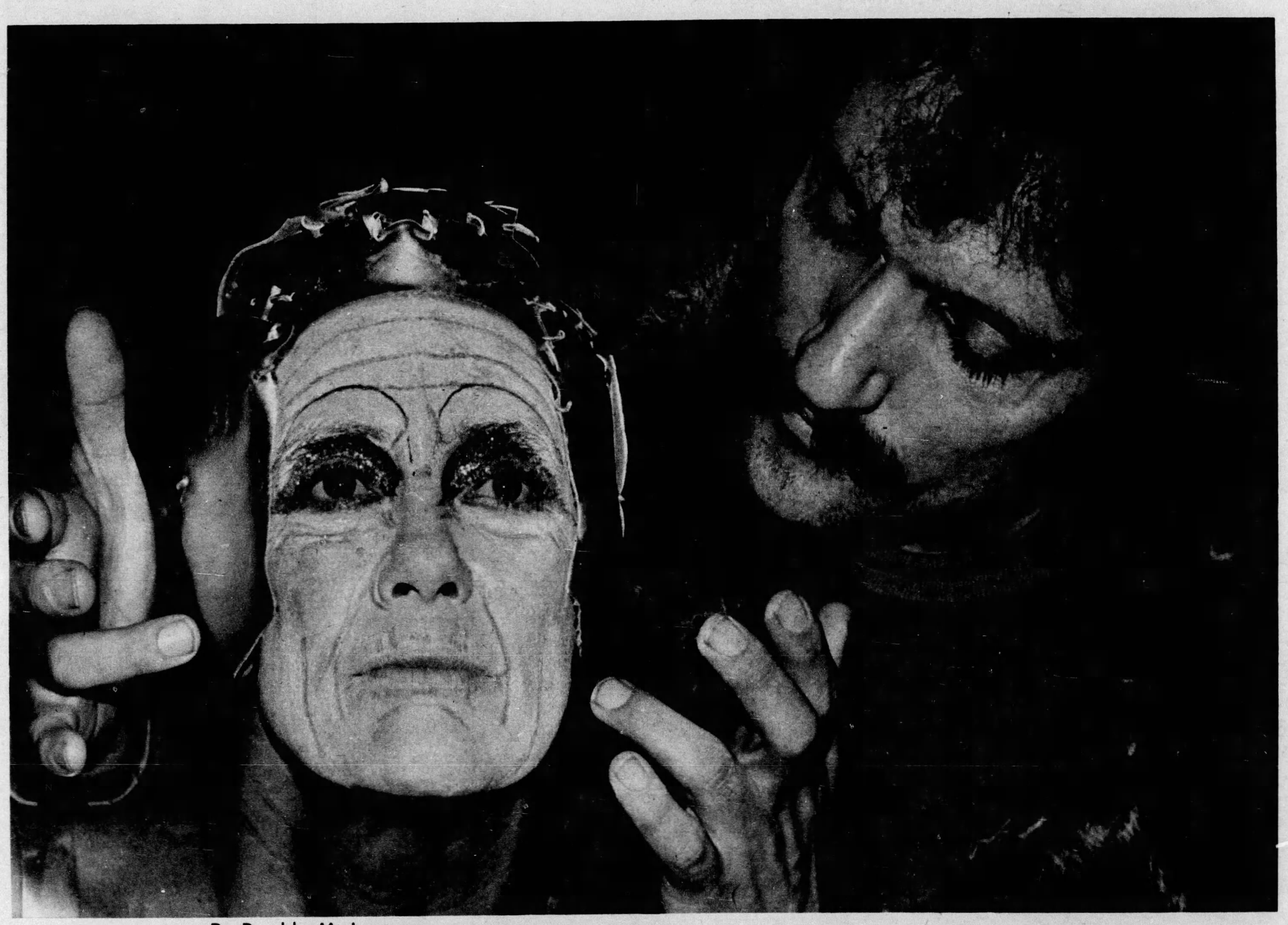
THE CARAVAN:

'You can be in theater and politics at the same time'

Below, Joe Volpe fashions "the perfectly trained woman" (Anne Barclay) in "How to Make A Woman." At right: Bobbi Ausubel and Stan Edelson.



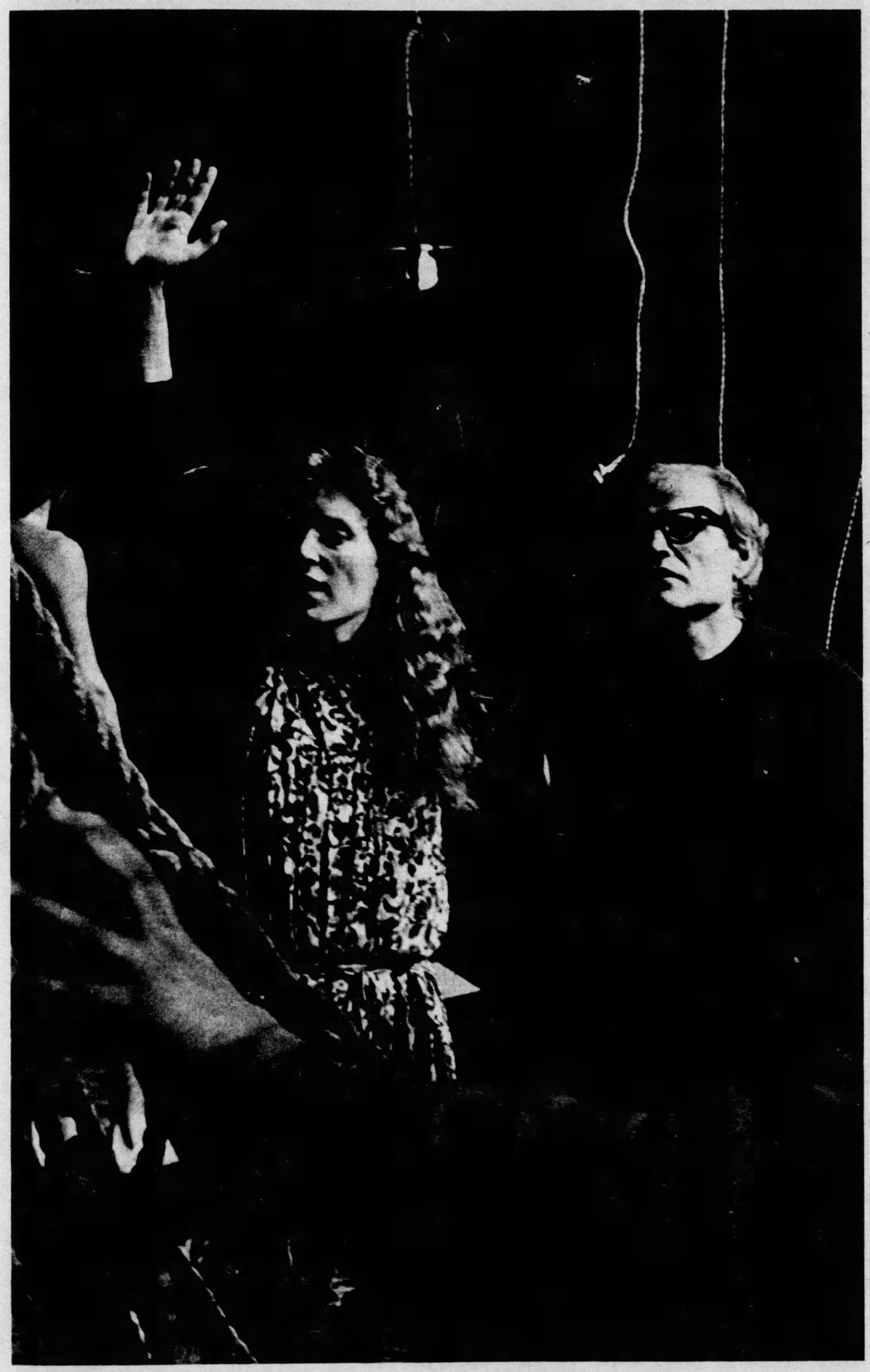
By Deckle McLean

THE Caravan Theater is a political theater in Cambridge. It didn't start out that way but discovered itself political as it went along. It is, then, like a lot of us nowadays. Not exactly politicised or radicalized – really it is both of these; but also neither – these being vogue terms falling tentatively from lips to be replaced, their replacements to be replaced. The Caravan Theater is in process.

That is, it is in The Process, the same one everyone else is in; part of which is to eventually realize you ARE in the process, at which point you can cease being frantic, and settle down to work. The Caravan appears to have reached the steadying recognition that no matter how fast you move, it will take a long time. – "We might be all wrong but we're moving somewhere" – They do not, however, seem to laugh much about it.

Laughter, though, is a conservative noise – when a situation is completely impossible it is funny, but when you think you can do something about it, you straighten your face – and the Caravan admits only one conservative influence, that of art. – "To me what's important is art. You've got to have both. If it's

Deckle McLean is on the staff of Globe Magazine. Nadine Rosenthal of Cambridge made the photographs.



just politics it doesn't work. But when you have both it's great. You can be in theater and politics at the same time."—And so, no matter how far toward the seemingly radical the company leans, it remains upright, ballasted by the discipline of fielding productions that succeed as theater. The requirement of communication, then, is a great gyroscope. It holds back those who would rush ahead, and it drags the laggards on. And whoever ignores it is out of the ball game. The Caravan Theater company seems to understand. It began, after all, as theater, not as politics.

□

WE are sitting in a living room in the Harvard Epworth

continued

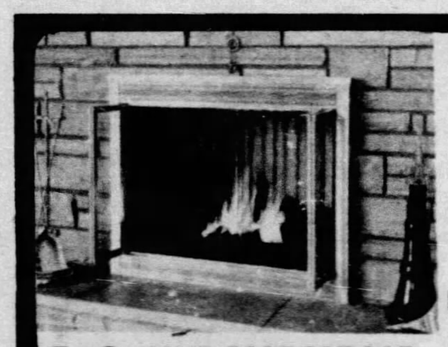
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Methodist Church, home of this repertory company; and we're talking about the liberation of women. People come to politics from different angles, and the Caravan arrived by way of the women's movement. —"If this turns out to be a women's lib story, make sure you say all the men here are feminists too." More specifically, it arrived through the evolution of its 45-month-old and still strong running show, How To Make A Woman, said to be a satire, but really a provocation in the form of satire.

Stan and Bobbi Edelson are here—Bobbi Ausubel, now: though 35, 15 years married with two children, she's taken the spirit to herself and returned to her former name, which is of course her father's name, which may or may not be part of the problem. She and her husband created How To Make A Woman in 1967 as a personal statement.

"When the play began, we thought each person who saw it could go off and solve the problem individually. Now women's liberation raises the possibility of solving it collectively." Bobbi.

ALSO in the room are Joe Volpe and David Klein, the two men of How To Make A Woman. Volpe has been with Caravan since its beginnings in 1965.

"There've been three major changes in the play. A movement toward finding out what is Aili like (central character who resists usual female definitions). At first she was a bitch, alienated from the rest of society. Later we cut off her head. And in the latest version she is rejecting the roles society offers her."

Volpe is effusive with real comic power. When he tells a story he goes heavy on body language, gesturing all over the place. Klein is precise. He holds anecdotes down to the facts, not hesitating to correct. On stage he projects in bursts, unlike Volpe, who generates a more steady energy. But off stage Klein lies low behind tight fitting glasses. Ausubel is cautious and scrupulously honest. She likes to say what she thinks, and when she smiles, small lines appear, reporting that she smiles often. And Edelson gives the impression of being gentle with others but ruthless with himself. He offers up items from the laboratory of himself.

"Men are tremendously threatened by the women's movement," he says, "and will be until they catch up with the traps. Of course, the male-female threat isn't the only one. It's just one of the consequences of being isolated. There're others, like body tension, power pressure diseases, like Mayor White's ulcer."

I HAVE asked why the movement to unlock sex roles has appeared from the women's side, why the women's liberation movement and not the men's; the implication of much that is said and of the play, How To Make A Woman, itself, being that men suffer as much from inflexible type-casting as women. A question with an obvious answer, perhaps.

"It's because the women are oppressed," he replies, "and the men just trapped. But men should talk about men's liberation."—oppressed," the language of the "revolution." Websters: *v.t., 1. to weigh heavily on the mind, spirit, or senses of; ... 2. to keep down by the cruel or unjust use of power or authority; burden with harsh rigorous impositions ... 3. (Obs.) a. to crush; ...* —

Bobbi offers: "It's because of power. Men have more power, and women have more self-hate." Does oppression, then, occur when everyone is trapped but one element maintains compensating prerogatives?

The play is said to be a satire, but is really a provocation in the form of satire

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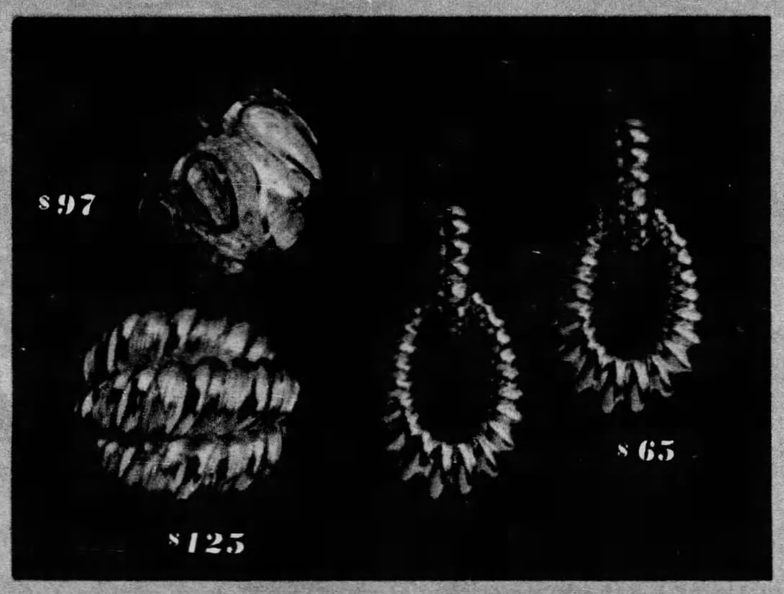
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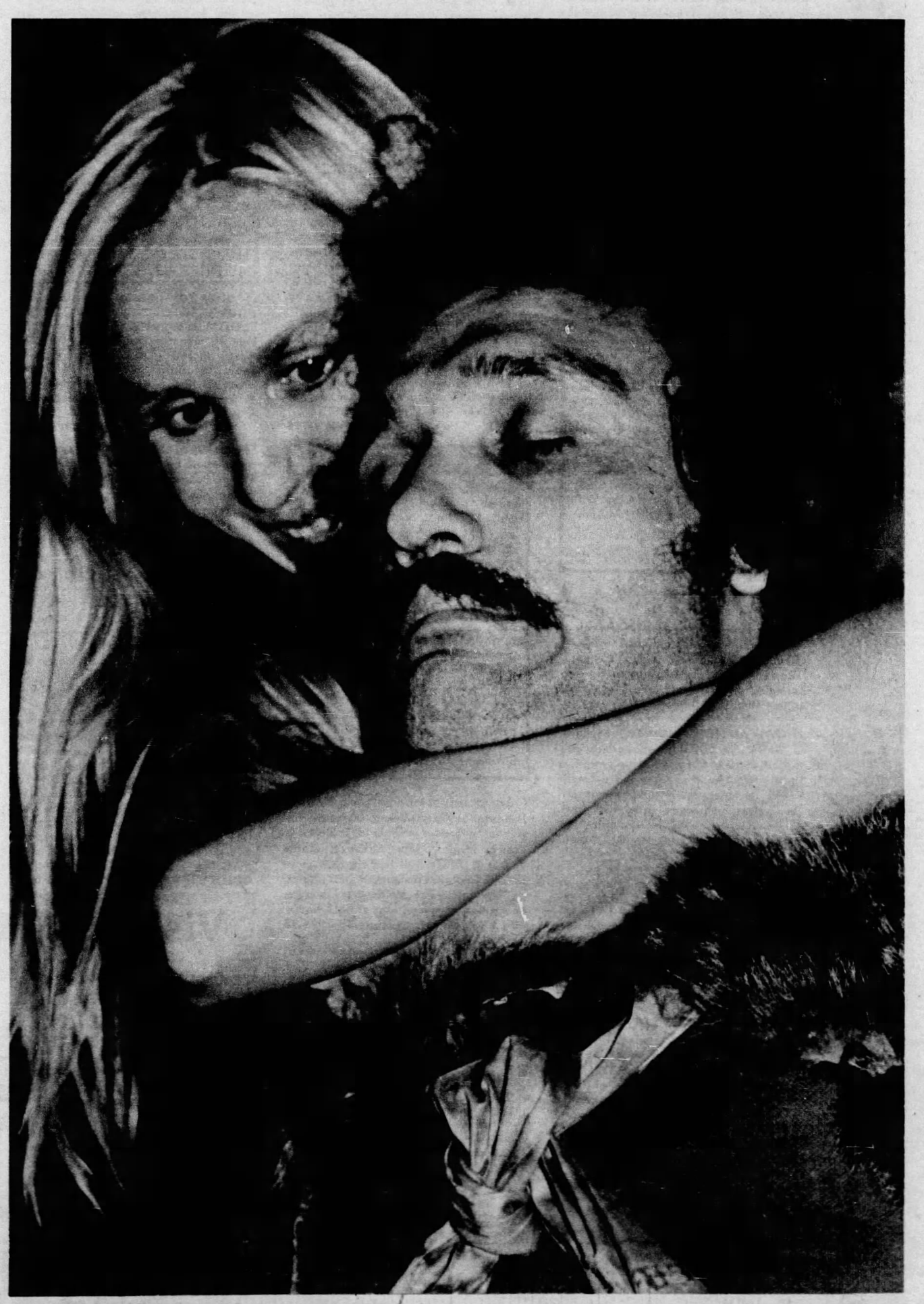
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LATER, Joanne Green, another member of the company, suggests that the movement has come from women because it has been women that have made the discovery: that values heretofore identified as female and negative – she names them as caring and self-indulgence – have been found by women to be not so negative after all, but "maybe positive values."

The discovery has led Bobbi Ausubel, at least, to look forward to a matriarchy, because, she says, "a matriarchy is not built on power." She offers a brief history of domination. "First there was probably a collective. Then came a male-female division of labor, and after that maybe the keeping of slaves. And that led into a patriarchy which was set up as a hierarchy. A matriarchy is collective, and where there's a collective, there is no hierarchy. Hierarchies are male values. But matriarchies have a different value system; they're not just hierarchies with women in control. They are founded not on power, but on care and

continued

When she smiles, small lines appear, reporting that she smiles often



Aili Singer turns to physical methods to get the attention of Joe Volpe, playing her husband

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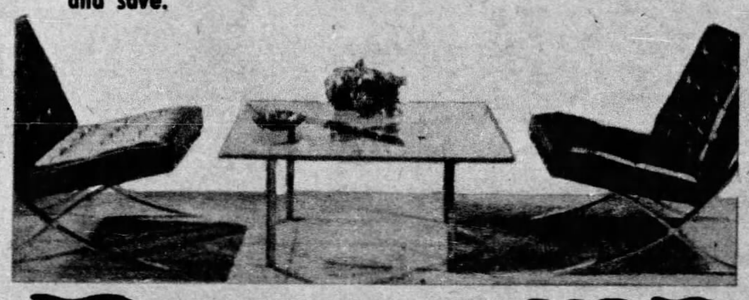


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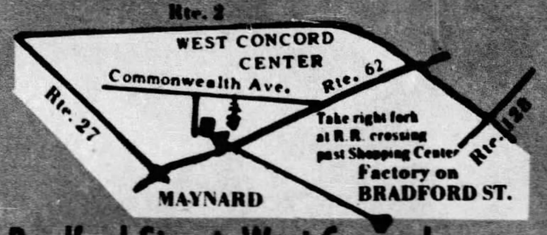


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warmth, a different way of being toward yourself and each other. That's why women's liberation can think differently about revolution. When you talk from a feminist base, that allows a critique of all revolutions that have happened before. The idea is caring."

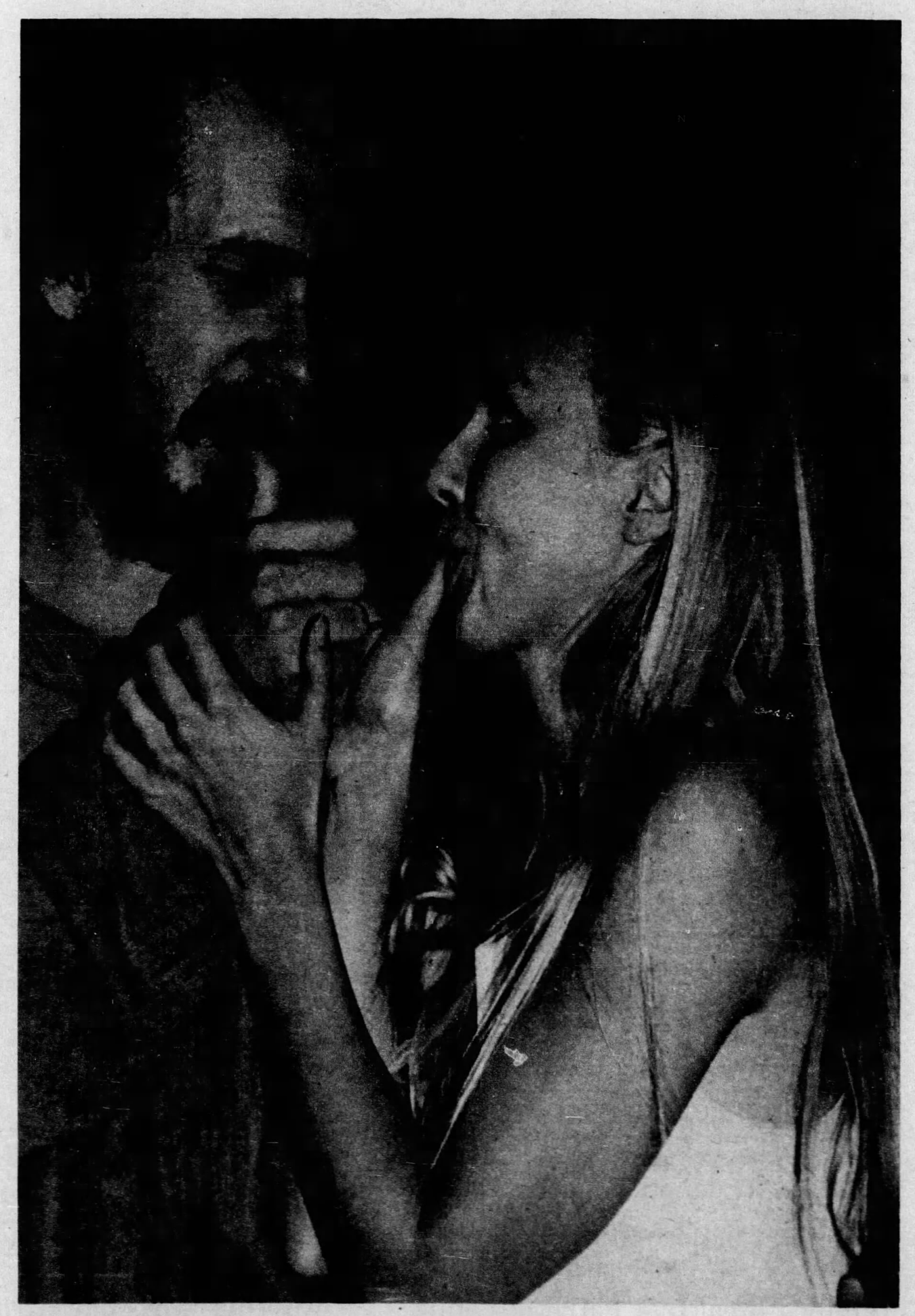
Bobbi Ausubel looks forward to a matriarchy, because, she says, "a matriarchy is not built on power"

I QUESTION: you mean you equate matriarchy and collective? Yes, she replies.

But, I suggest, many blacks say the same thing, the only difference being that the line is drawn at black-white rather than women-men. Many blacks, I say, identify the black life style as communal and offer a history linking that life style to African culture. Then I sit back and wait for this Caravan company to chuckle at the possible tricks the mind can play, to say something like: "yeah, funny the way we all say the same thing and put it in our own terms. Ho, ho, ho. Maybe people really do have an infinite capacity for self-deception. Anyhow, we're all leaning the same way."

But no, they don't say that. Instead they come back with great seriousness; Bobbi then Stan. "Oh. It's the white man.

continued



Aili and David Klein share an intimate moment

That's right. It's the white man," they say. And for a moment I wonder about the Caravan Theater, being suspicious of faith without doubt, and commitment without self-humor; and speculate briefly that the rhetoric in each little segment of social change obscures from everyone the logic of the whole pattern. A little later, though, Bobbi says "It's a good tool." And I feel better.

HOW to Make a Woman is a long one-act play. It takes two women into a shop run by men, where they are, essentially, seduced into trying on roles in the form of garments. One of the women succumbs to the lust-body role, buys it, as it were; the other, after trying on that and the other roles, big momma and little girl, rejects all and swings into a screaming escape from the shop. Each role, as offered, triggers memories in the women, and they relive birth, childhood, marriage. The play is often very funny, the pantomime expert, and you are taken down into some familiar subtleties that perhaps you didn't think were so familiar. The play, though, offers no options out of the locked roles. And the Caravan company is content to have it that way. – "The strongest statement we could make is that Aili have no options but to break out of the shop." – And yet, that conclusion is not the one the play started with, but is, they say, like the discussion groups for the audience that follow each performance, suggested by the spirit of the movement.

For a moment I wonder, being suspicious of faith without doubt and commitment without self-humor

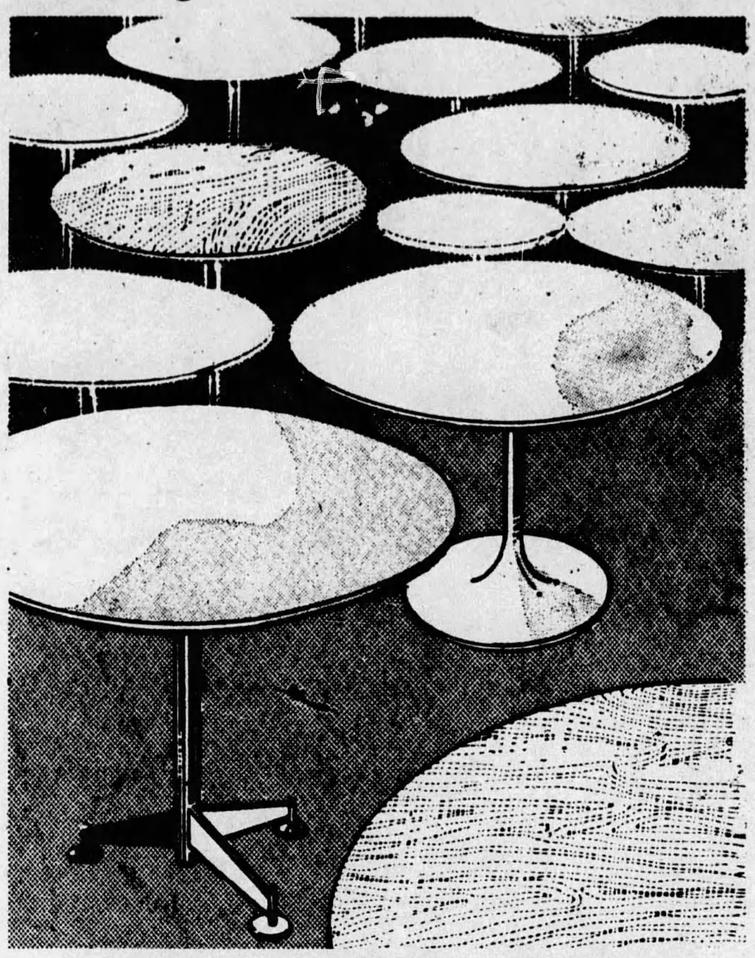
HOW To Make A Woman is not the theater's first play, nor will it be the last – the Edelsons were once reported as saying they try to do a Brecht every year, and have done The Measures Taken and Caucasian Chalk Circle: and also Genet's The Maid, and Iphigenia in Aulis by Euripides, plus original improvisations. And early in 1971 there will be a new play, in the works for a year now, a venture further down the road already taken in How To Make A Woman. The new play, Jason-Medea, promises to be heavier than the last – the legend holds that she killed her children as a desperate communication with the man: how could it fail to be heavier.

continued



Barbara Fleischman (left) sees herself as an old woman (Anne Barclay)

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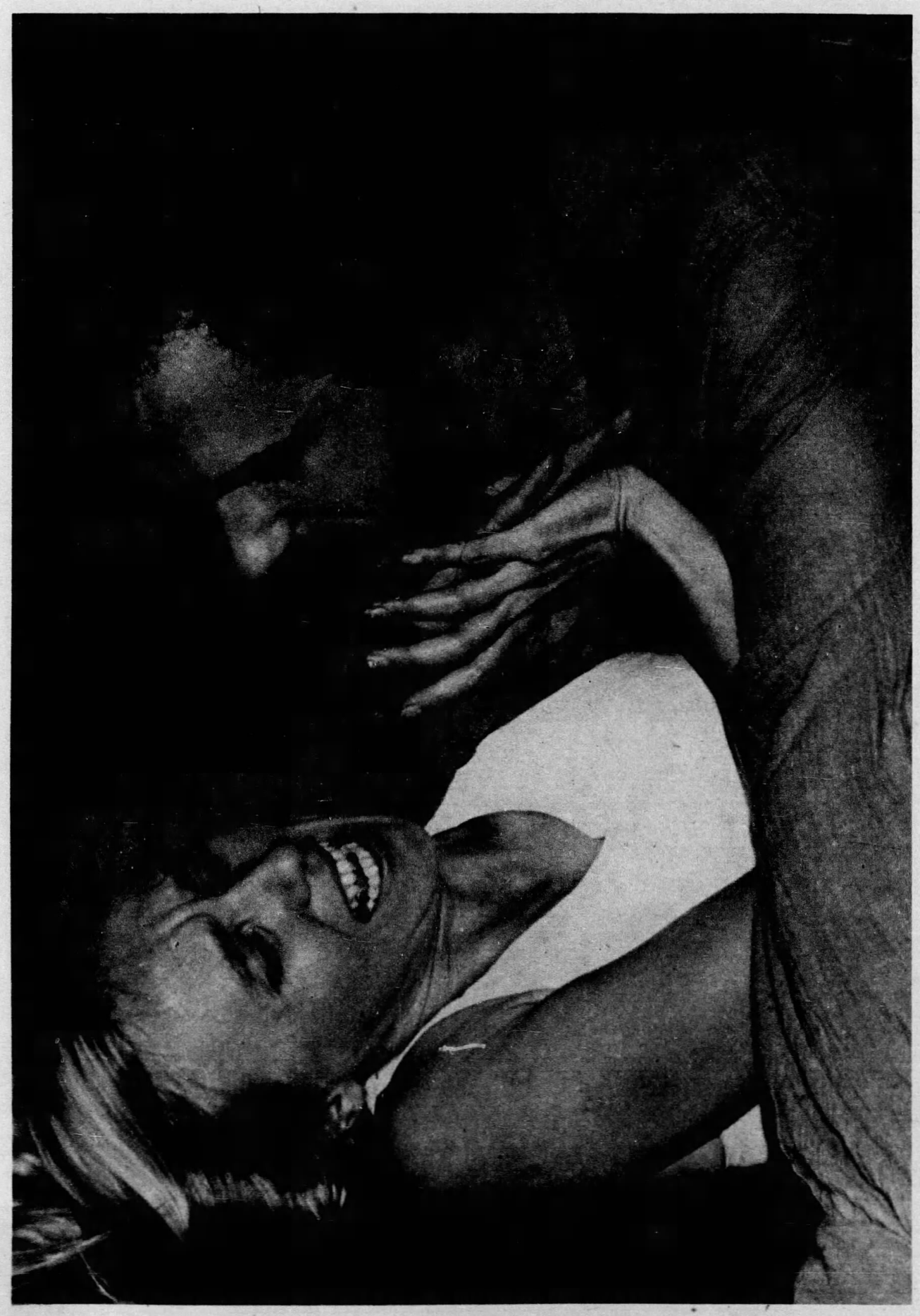
Unlike Woman, Jason-Medea presents alternatives, and though we don't know what they are, we do know they proceed in a collective direction, and also they carry thorough-reaching implications for the members of the theater company.

Says Stan Edelson: "If we put into the play what we think people should be doing, we have to act on it. Believing it is not enough any more. So, if we say that marriage is oppressive we're going to have to rethink our lives."

And yet, the process by which the company develops its material seems itself to be a rethinking of the lives of those involved.

continued

It is a cooperative theater without any line of control on the inside. Instead, there is a rotating committee to handle internal matters



Aili tries to resist the advances of the hunter (David Klein)

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Improvisations on given situations. Exploring feelings by acting out. Pieces from private lives incorporated into the production. – Part of Jason-Medea, I was told, is built around an experience of one of the actors, something he remembered in a working session. – The practice of the theater to date, then, has been collective. "I think of How To Make All Woman as a collective experience," says Joe Volpe. "I don't feel like an actor in it."

AND yet, the theater is pushing the collectivization further. It is now a cooperative theater without any line of control on the inside. Instead, there is a rotating committee to handle internal affairs.

Why? "Because the outside crashes in on us," says Edelson. "That's the reason we're a social theater. We break out of a power hierarchy structure because society is becoming collective. Oh, not Nixon and some of them. But the people who are dealing with the important changes. So, we open our doors to it."

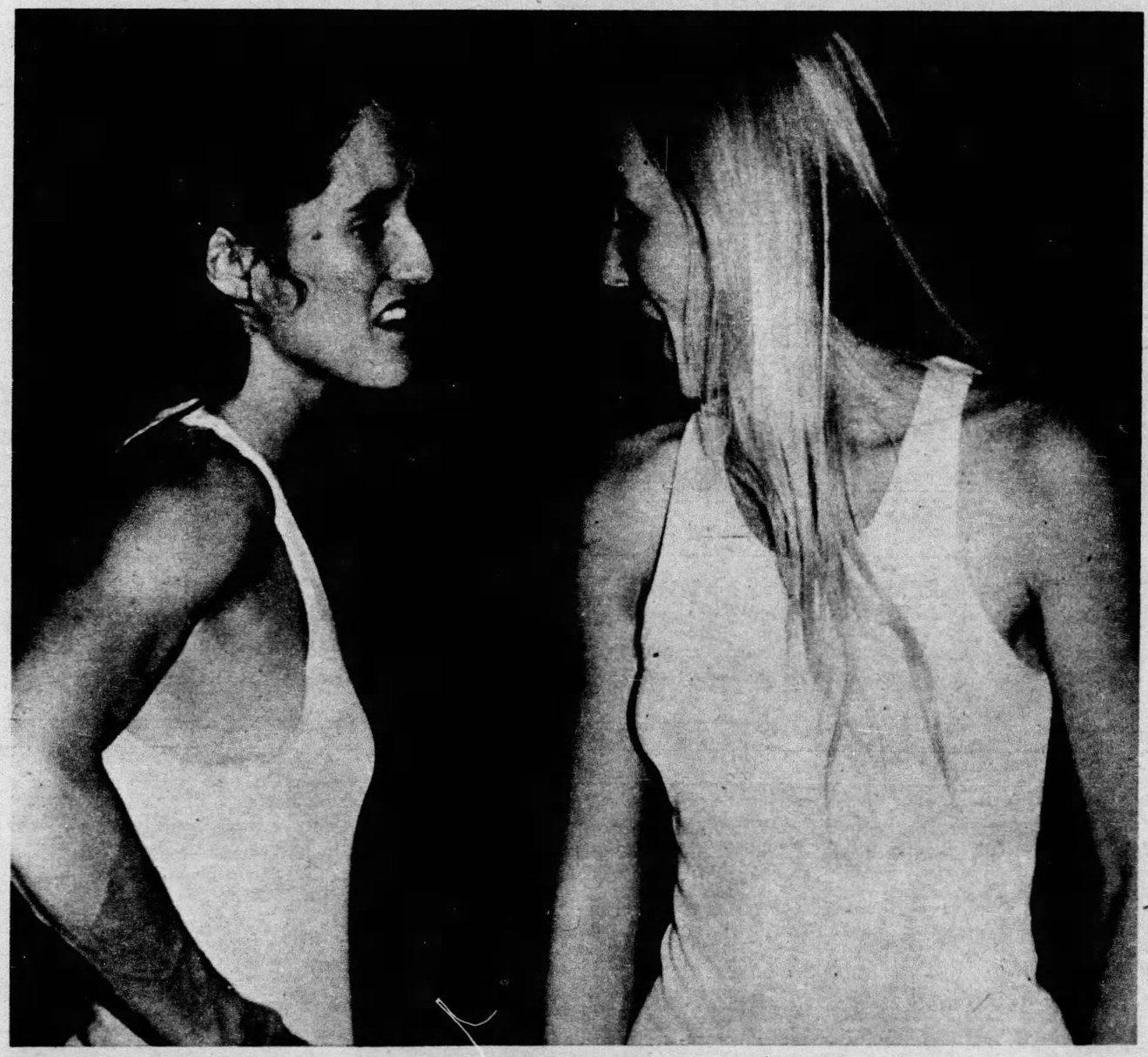
One specific crash from the outside is by telephone. According to Barbara Bregstein, who handles the box office, the theater receives three to five performance requests each week. Often they come quite far—though the theater hasn't gone west yet, How to Make A Woman has been performed in Utah. In addition, the Edelsons recently traveled to Europe and found some interest in the play there.

"We have the wonderful dilemma," says Bregstein, who goes by the nickname Buzz, "whether to tour the country or to go to Europe. But we'll probably stay here. Some of us think the condition of our country is such that we ought to stay here. There's a demand for the play. People need it, they want it. It really is affecting people. What comes to mind is the phrase 'love it or leave it'. We're supposed to do the most possible."

AND yet, sometimes, it is the experiences that come when you do the most possi-

continued

The Edelsons recently traveled to Europe and found interest in the play there



Barbara and Aili call each other whores in Caravan Theater production

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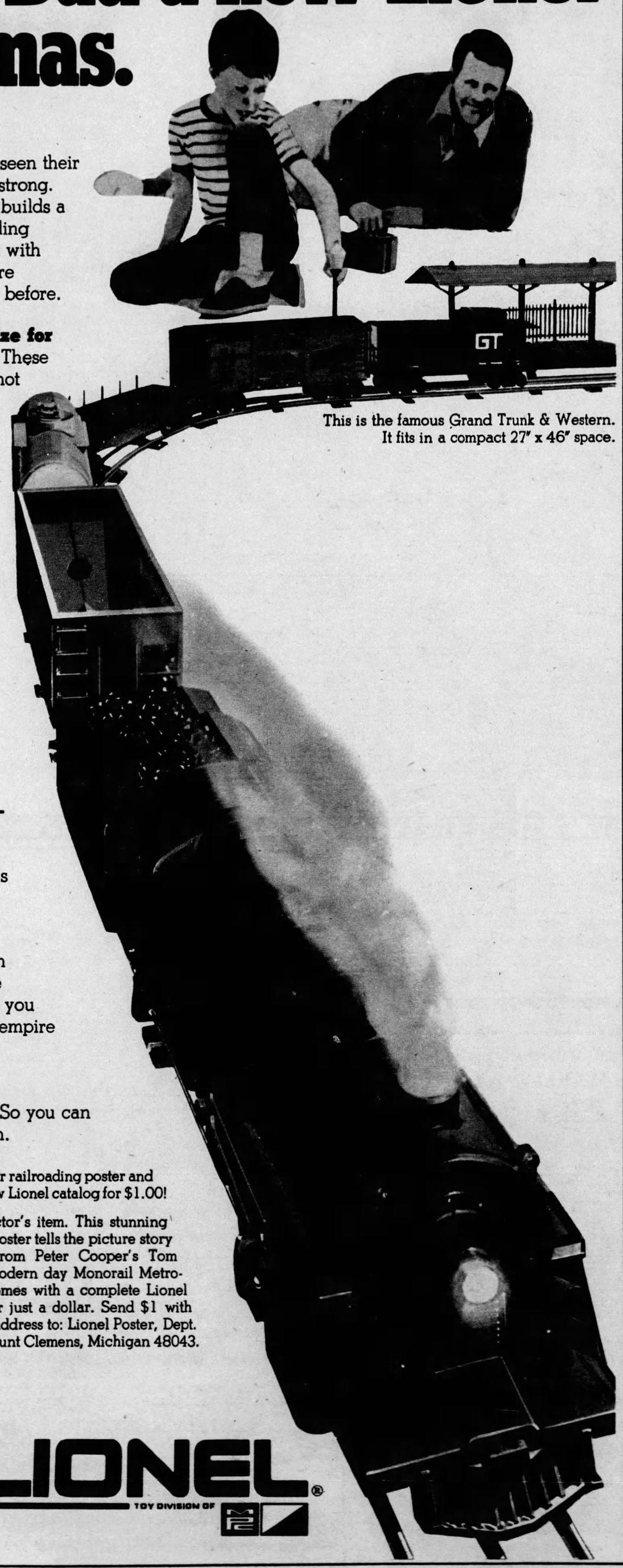
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ble, that do the most to you. A performance and layover at Syracuse University in October demonstrates the point.

"We went, wondering whom we should seek out there, what community," reported Stan. "And we did find one. It was a political community of White Panthers, women's groups and gay liberation. They were real power-to-the-people people. They came on strong, but they were not seeing us. We were more personal and they were more political."

Bobbi took exception to the distinction. "Personal can be political," she said. "Ways of relating can be political. But their politics seemed to be coming from the outside while ours comes from inside. We did learn some things from them, though. Like why the Panthers often insist on representing themselves in court without lawyers. It's to make the courts talk directly to people, instead of keeping the language and the meanings to themselves and the lawyers."

"One thing we noticed in Syracuse," offered Volpe, "was that the men in the groups didn't look at you when they talked to you, and we told them about that. Their approach was ideological but not personal. The only time they got personal was when they were talking about being injured by policemen."

AND so it seems that the Caravan returned from Syracuse having affirmed something about themselves: that although their commitment points them down the same road the ideological revolutionists are on, they come from somewhere else, and in fact are committed to something a little different. They owe nothing to political ideologies or abstractions, they owe only to the sense of their personal lives that they can dredge up through theatrical techniques. And being theater people their focus excludes what cannot find dramatic meaning in the common experiences of most everyone.

"Our plays and personal lives are so enmeshed," says Stan Edelson in conclusion. But he does not say: social change, revolution and politics are so enmeshed in our lives. It goes without saying that they are. But he brings everything to bear on theater.

"Our plays are political because they change people's lives." Bobbi Ausubel says. But, by this measure, all art of any consequence is political; so the term is meaningless in this context, and one can wonder why anyone would bother to make such use of it.

This theater, then, might not be political. The Caravan Theater is a theater in Cambridge.



"Parents" David and Aili force daughter Barbara to behave, while Joe and Anne, as doctor and nurse, do their bit



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