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ON STAGE AND OFF

Jesse McKinley

After the Tonys, Moving Vans

The post-Tony housecleaning began in earnest this week with closing notices going up at the Plymouth Theater ("Bells Are Ringing"), the Ambassador Theater ("A Class Act") and the Brooks Atkinson ("Jane Eyre"). Also packing its trunk is the current tenant of the Belasco, "Follies," which will be shuttered on July 14.

But the vacancies have been quickly filled. "Thou Shalt Not," the Susan Stroman-Harry Connick Jr. collaboration, has taken the Plymouth, setting an Oct. 25 opening night. The show is a musical adaptation of "Thérèse Raquin," Émile Zola's 19th-century novel of adultery and murder, which Ms. Stroman and Mr. Connick have transplanted to 1946 New Orleans, Mr. Connick's hometown.

"Hedda Gabler," an acclaimed production of the Ibsen classic directed by Nicholas Martin and adapted by Jon Robin Baitz, has also set an October opening. As expected, the play, which stars Kate Burton, will be at the Ambassador. Previews will begin on Sept. 19 for an Oct. 4 opening. Randall L. Wreghitt is the lead producer.

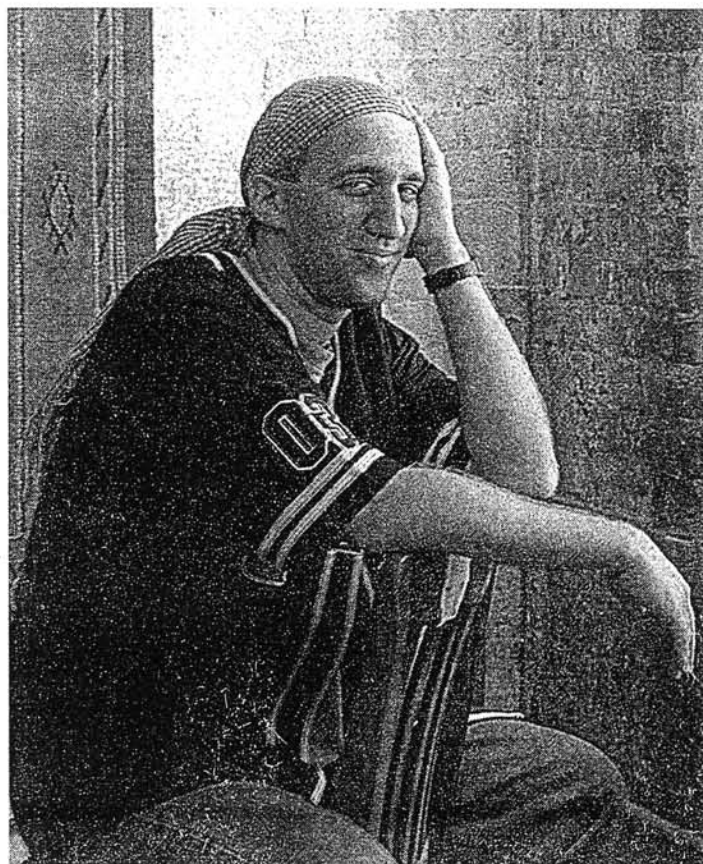
As for "Thou Shalt Not," the producer is Lincoln Center Theater, which seems to have a yen for classics reset in Louisiana; in 1999, the theater produced "Marie Christine," Michael John LaChiusa's adaptation of "Medea," which took place in 19th-century New Orleans. (Maybe they saved the sets.) Craig Bierko and Kate Levering are cast.

The theater was also prepared to announce the first show for its smaller stage, the Mitzi E. Newhouse. It will be "Everett Beekin," a new comedy by Richard Greenberg about two generations of an immigrant family and its life on two different coasts. It will be a big year for Mr. Greenberg; his adaptation of Strindberg's "Dance of Death," with Sir Ian McKellen and Helen Mirren, is likely to play at the Broadhurst, soon to be vacated by "Fosse."

Just Say . . . Yes?

It's been a big year for goofy musicals, with "Bat Boy" downtown and "Urinetown" moving to Broadway. Now, comes word of a third: "Reefer Madness."

The show, a sellout hit in Los Ange-



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Hip-hop Hoch (as in rock): Danny Hoch, writer and festival curator.

les in 1999-2000, is based on the 1936 propaganda film that recounts the harrowing story of teenagers seduced by marijuana, the shadowy and illegal drug sometimes known as reefer.

The musical, which is to open at the Variety Arts Theater in early October, loosely follows the movie's plot, telling how Jimmy and Mary, a fine young couple, are led into a hellish spiral of cannibis, cannibalism and show tunes. James L. Nederlander Jr., one of the show's producers, may have best described the show's ethos: "It's like 'Leave It to Beaver' meets 'Rocky Horror.'"

"Reefer Madness" was written by Dan Studney and Kevin Murphy, buddies from Drew University who wrote the show whilst toiling in the television industry. It was not, they insist, drug-induced.

"We weren't stoned during any of it," Mr. Murphy said. "I need every little brain cell I have."

Celebrating Sondheim

The Kennedy Center's salute to Stephen Sondheim planned for next year is becoming even more ambitious, with more details announced by the center yesterday.

The celebration, as it is being called, will feature six new productions of Mr. Sondheim's musicals and one import, a Japanese version of "Pacific Overtures," chosen by the composer. This week four directors were named: Christopher Ashley, who will direct "Sweeney Todd" and "Merrily We Roll Along"; Mark Brokaw, "A Little Night Music"; Sean Mathias, "Company"; and Eric Schaeffer, who is the artistic director of the festival. He will direct "Passion" and "Sunday in the Park with George."

Mr. Sondheim, who met with the directors on Wednesday, said he was excited to see all the shows run in repertory in Washington. He also

hinted that at least one of the seven shows at the Kennedy Center may be seen in New York.

"I hope it will be like a carnival," he said. "Or like the Monty Python skit: 'And now for something completely different . . .'"

Hip-Hop Hoch

Ask Danny Hoch to describe hip-hop theater, and he has to take a moment.

"We've had a lot of talks about this," he says. "It's tough."

Then, in the manner of the fast-thinking, fast-talking performer he is, Mr. Hoch (pronounced like ROCK) says: "It's the idea that there is a theater in hip-hop itself—whether it's the theater of b-boying—break dancing—or the theater of monologue of the emcee, or the theater of the rapper. There's a whole generation of hip-hop kids that has gone to theater school. And a lot of us, we don't want to do Shakespeare anymore. Our stories that are really about us are not really being told unless we tell them. So we're going to tell them."

Indeed, beginning on Thursday, Mr. Hoch and 14 other performers and playwrights will demonstrate exactly what this new genre is as part of the second annual New York City Hip-Hop Theater Festival at Performance Space 122 in the East Village. Mr. Hoch, 30, the festival's curator, will do a one-night stint of his own play, "Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop," on June 16.

The three-week festival, which includes plays, dance and poetry, will feature acts from London and Los Angeles, including a hip-hop mime named Benji Reid. Mr. Hoch said: "Are you going to see Tennessee Williams? No. But you're definitely going to see theater."