

American Theatre

AMERICAN THEATRE is published by Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the nonprofit professional theatre.

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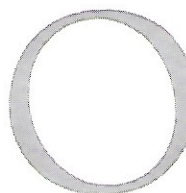
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AMERICAN THEATRE is supported in part by grants from EXXON CORPORATION, THE FORD FOUNDATION and NEW YORK COMMUNITY TRUST.

AMERICAN THEATRE, formerly Theatre Communications (ISSN 0275-5971), is published 11 times a year (double issue July/Aug.). Subscription price, \$24 per year in the U.S.; \$31 per year in Canada and all other countries. Copyright © 1984, Theatre Communications Group. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Statements of writers and advertisers are not necessarily those of the publisher. Editorial, circulation and advertising offices: 355 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. Application to mail at second-class postage rates pending at New York, NY. Postmaster: Please send address changes to American Theatre, c/o Theatre Communications Group, 355 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. USA newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 111 Eighth Ave., New York, NY 10011.

EDITOR'S NOTE



ver more than a dozen years of celebrity, Sam Shepard has kept his own counsel. Aggressively reclusive, notoriously recalcitrant in the rarely granted interview, Shepard has seemed (as his long-time collaborator John Lion puts it in these pages) "apparently comfortable in his role as cipher."

None of this mattered to Amy Lippman. Lippman was a 19-year-old writing student at Harvard University when she sent a "Dear Mr. Shepard" letter off last year in care of the Magic Theatre in her hometown of San Francisco. Preparations were underway there, she had heard, for the premiere of another Shepard play, directed by the playwright. "I'll be in San Francisco for Christmas," she wrote him. "May I meet you and interview you for Harvard's student magazine?"

The note from Shepard arrived in a matter of days: she was invited to sit in on a rehearsal of the new play—*Fool for Love*, it was called—and he'd be available to talk after. There were some constraints—he wouldn't answer questions about his personal life, the interview was to be tape-recorded to guard against his being misquoted—but the tone was cordial, the invitation genuine. It was a response, Lippman rightly imagined, that would have set experienced arts reporters from *Esquire* or *Saturday Review* back on their heels.

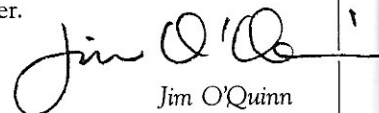
On the afternoon of New Year's Day 1983, Lippman was nestled in a dark back-row seat at the Magic Theatre watching Shepard the director stage a scene by Shepard the playwright. Afterwards, she and her tape recorder spent more than two hours over dinner in a nearby Italian restaurant with yet another Shepard, one that few strangers have had access to—Shepard the conversational artist. In response to her informed, sometimes surprisingly insistent questions, Shepard opened up to reveal more of his ideas about theatre, more about his working process, more about his own complex self-image than other interviews had ever elicited.

Lippman's interview was first published in the March 1983 issue of the *Harvard Advocate*, the school's journal of literature and the arts. In *American Theatre's* slightly scaled-down version, Shepard talks about the meaning of myth, about the American family, the critics, film acting, his affinity for music—and the conversation is often as improbably funny as it is revealing.

We have paired Lippman's interview with an article—part reminiscence, part critical overview—by John Lion, who has played an intimate role in Shepard's theatrical career over the past 10 years. Together the two pieces reflect the kind of rich, imaginative reporting about the theatre and its leading figures that we hope to bring you in the feature pages of *American Theatre*.

And, through its departments, its guest opinion columns, its editorials and critical commentary, the magazine aims for scope as well as depth. A detailed preview of arts legislation facing the 1984 Congress and analysis of the crucial situation facing the National Endowment for the Arts, both in this month's Government section, reflect that aim.

Like its predecessor *Theatre Communications*, *American Theatre* finds its focus in the nonprofit professional theatre nationwide, but Broadway, international theatre and a wealth of related art forms also fall under its purview. We are pleased to have you as a reader.


Jim O'Quinn