
The New York Times

ARTS AND LEISURE DESK: SUNDAY NEW YORK TIMES

Published: March 19, 2006

DIRECTIONS;

Taking Every Page From Shaw's Book

By ROBERT SIMONSON

Proof that the actor David Staller has George Bernard Shaw on the brain came when he was asked his age. "When Shaw died, he was 46 years older than I am now." Uh-huh. For those who don't know that the Irish-born playwright lived to 94, that means Mr. Staller is 48.

He can be forgiven for thinking of everything in terms of Shaw. Not only did he recently conclude an extended run as part of the cast of the Irish Repertory Theater's production of "Mrs. Warren's Profession," but his new theater company, the Gingold Group, has also started a reading series titled, with military urgency, "Project Shaw." Its immodest goal is to give an airing to every Shavian full-length play, one-act and sketch. "Heartbreak House," the third entry in the series, will be read at the Players club in Gramercy Park on Monday.

At one reading a month, the venture will take about three years. But that's nothing to a man who has been preoccupied with Shaw for three decades, ever since he heard the irascible dramatist speaking on an old radio broadcast. "At first I thought it was just comical, but there was such a sense of reason," he recalled, adding later, "there was something shockingly clearheaded about what he was saying, about the individuality that we should embrace in ourselves."

He wanted to showcase every scrap of Shaw in part for a selfish reason: "I'd really just like to be able to hear them all."

Lately, however, his single-minded quest to honor Shaw hasn't been such a lonely one. Attracting actors hasn't been a problem, and he has drawn Broadway regulars like Malcolm Gets, Rebecca Luker and Marc Kudisch. Marian Seldes has claimed "The Apple Cart" for herself and Brian Murray. And Mr. Staller will be forced to disappoint some role-seekers: "Everyone, male and female, wants to play Saint Joan."



Photo by Alexander Berg