

# On Stage, and Off Bruce Weber

■ A joint venture may link film and the theater ■ Canine actor in salary dispute ■ Francis Ford Coppola, playwright.

## A Joint Adventure?

In an unusual, if not unique, arrangement, a Hollywood producer has agreed to underwrite 10 play commissions over the next two years. The commissions, which will be produced and developed by Playwrights Horizons, the recipient of the \$12,000 each will go to playwrights, the recipients of the money. The agreement was announced by Don Scardino, president of Playwrights Horizons, and by Steven Spielberg, president of Amblin Entertainment, Mr. Spielberg's investment in the play as a production company. The agreement will give playwrights a chance to produce their work.

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Second, Mr. Scardino said, it would help protect playwrights who have been burned by Hollywood who are simply afraid of it, because "the playwrights, for my money, are king in the theater," he said. "In Hollywood, they aren't." But now, he said, the theater that helped develop the play for the stage would be creatively involved with adapting the play for the screen. And finally, he said, if the partnership grows, hopefully we can generate our own film projects, an association with Spielberg," which would help to rejuvenate the film business in New York.

The agreement came about after Mr. Spielberg recently visited Playwrights last season and was impressed enough to offer to underwrite a new commission. That, Mr. Scardino said, is when he realized: Hey, I got Spielberg on the hook here. "So I wrote to him," said Mr. Scardino, an actor and director of plays and television who recently directed his first feature film, "Me and Veronica."

What advantage Amblin gains from all this is not terribly clear. Mr. Spielberg did not respond to an interview request, but Deborah Neumyer, Amblin's senior vice president for development, said: "Will we get new films out of this? Perhaps. But when one is in the business of developing, you develop a wide-net approach. This is actually an affirmation of Don and the belief that he'll bring us back material and introduce us to writers we wouldn't have found."

On the surface it all sounds good. But several agents, producers and other theater and film people consulted this week raised their eyebrows over what some viewed as an uneasy coupling of separate art forms whose interests rarely coincide.

(None would be skeptical for attribution.) Some wondered how Mr. Scardino would manage to run a theater and make films at the same time. Or why Mr. Spielberg, given his vast resources, didn't just give money to Playwrights Horizons without expecting something in return. But first and foremost was the worry that the interest of film making would intrude on or even supersede that of putting on plays at one of the city's most important nonprofit theaters. "I wouldn't want it to become Screenwriters Horizons," is how one person put it.

Still, confronted with the one concrete detail of the agreement — 10 new play commissions from an unexpected source — everyone said that that, at least, was inarguably a good thing.



Paula Court

## One Actor, Two Roles

For a live-performance film, Ron Vawter will present his one-man show, "Roy Cohn/Jack Smith," about two New Yorkers who lived with AIDS (Part 1 by Gary Indiana, Part 2 by Jack Smith), Sunday through Tuesday and Oct. 31, at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, in Chelsea. The final performance is a benefit for the Kitchen. Information: (212) 255-5793.

"I said: 'I want to start Playwrights Horizons Films, and I'm looking for a partner.'"

Francis Ford Coppola makes his debut as a playwright during the 52d Street Project's "Pivotal Roles," an evening of six plays written by theater professionals in collaboration with inner-city teen-agers. Mr. Coppola and his collaborator, Victor Rojas, 13, contributed "Everybody Get on Uncle Sam's Bond Wagon," a 15-minute opus about a boy whose father is a songwriter. "Pivotal Roles" is scheduled for Oct. 30 through Nov. 1 at the New York Theater Workshop. Admission is free. Reservations: (212) 642-8444.

## A Dog Actor's Life

Purists, listen closely. When the cast album of "Annie Warbucks" is released on Nov. 16, it won't be Cindy Lou, the terrier mix who plays Sandy, barking to the music in the song "Somebody's Gotta Do Something." Piqued that the dog would not be paid a fee equivalent to that of an actor, the dog's trainer, Bill Berloni, wouldn't bring Cindy Lou to the recording session.

"The record company said, 'Because it's a dog, we'll offer a third of what the actors get,'" said Mr. Berloni, who said it took months to get Cindy Lou to perform the feat of barking on a musical cue, but whose arithmetic is shoddy. "I usually get what the actors get." The actor's minimum is \$950. Mr. Berloni said he was offered \$250. (The Actors Equity contract specifies that anyone in the cast who "sings or verbalizes" on stage must be hired for the cast album. It doesn't cover animal noises or animals.)

Steve Murphy, the president of Angel Records, the company releasing the record, confirmed that he was never able to come to an agreement with Mr. Berloni regarding the dog's salary, but he said Mr. Berloni had insisted on more than the minimum. Mr. Murphy also said that time was short, and that Mr. Berloni made negotiating so complicated and difficult the company finally decided to make "other accommodations."

"It was my goal to, as quickly as possible, get a wonderful record out this Christmas," Mr. Murphy said. "So the train was leaving the station and Sandy got left on the platform."

Mr. Berloni, whose credits as a trainer include Asta in "Nick and Nora" and the original Sandy in the original "Annie," said this was just one more example of theater standards being lowered by "people who don't care about the art form who come in and bastardize it just to make a buck." He added: "How can they call this the original cast album? Is Sandy part of the cast?"

## Coppola's New Role

Francis Ford Coppola makes his debut as a playwright during the 52d Street Project's "Pivotal Roles," an evening of six plays written by theater professionals in collaboration with inner-city teen-agers. Mr. Coppola and his collaborator, Victor Rojas, 13, contributed "Everybody Get on Uncle Sam's Bond Wagon," a 15-minute opus about a boy whose father is a songwriter. "Pivotal Roles" is scheduled for Oct. 30 through Nov. 1 at the New York Theater Workshop. Admission is free. Reservations: (212) 642-8444.

