



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for The Colored Museum

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In the beginning Broadway was very skeptical about ELT

[[image - black & white photograph of James Earl Jones and Leslie Rivers in Norman Rosten's *Mister Johnson* (1963-1964 season).]] Bert Andrews

[[image - black & white photograph, Darlene Parks confronts Treat Williams in William Inge's *Bus Stop* (1975).]] Gary Wheeler

only Actors' Equity members could perform; they would not be paid; no original plays could be presented - only revivals; each production had to be done with minimal sets, costumes and lighting, on a budget of \$50; and shows could run for no more than three performances.

Broadway was very skeptical about ELT in the beginning. What could this project hope to attain on such a shoestring budget? ELT surprised them. Its first production consisted of two one-act plays, *The Shadow of the Glen* and *Fumed Oak*, in February 1944 at the Hudson Park Branch of the N. Y. Public Library. It was a creditable production and it was followed by five other presentations that season. Actress Terese Hayden was an active organizer in these early days.

For its second season, ELT astonished Broadway by staging 37 productions, topping this with 48 shows in 1945 - 46 and 56 presentations in 1946 - 47. This made ELT the most prolific single producer in New York. The productions ranged from such classics as *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night* and *Othello* to such comedies as *Holiday*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Blithe Spirit*. From the beginning, ELT also specialized in reviving Broadway plays that would otherwise rarely be seen. Some examples: *Correspondent Unknown*, *The World We Make*, *Maedchen in Uniform*, *Letters to Lucerne* and hundreds of others.

During ELT's fifth season (1947 - 48) some important changes occurred. John Golden continued to offer financial support and Ruth Hammond secured a group of sponsors, but the Library withdrew its facilities and George Freedley resigned as the project's co-chairman. "ELT had to find other theatres for their productions," Wojtasik reports, "and they ended up using the Greenwich Mews Playhouse, the Guild for the Jewish Blind, the Society of Illustrators and the Lenox Hill Playhouse, which became ELT's home for a number of years."

In 1961, ELT moved to the Master Theatre at 103rd Street and Riverside Drive,

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[[advertisement]]

WHY

[[image - color picture of AT&T card and key]]

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James Earl Jones and Leslie Rivers in Norman Rosten's *Mister Johnson* (1963-1964 season).
Darlene Parks confronts Treat Williams in William Inge's *Bus Stop* (1975).

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