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Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)

Stephen J. Bottoms

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"Scrupulously researched, critically acute, and written with care, *Playing Underground* will become a classic account of an era of hard-won free expression."
-William Coco

"At last---a book documenting the beginnings of Off-Off Broadway theater. *Playing Underground* is an insightful, illuminating, and honest appraisal of this important period in American theater."
-Rosalyn Drexler, author of *Art Does (Not!) Exist* and *Occupational Hazard*

"An epic movie of an epic movement, *Playing Underground* is a book the world has waited for without knowing it. How precisely it captures the evolution of our revolution! I am amazed by the book's scope and scale, and I bless its author especially for giving two greats, Paul Foster and H. M. Koutoukas, their proper, polar places, and for memorializing such unjustly forgotten masterpieces as Irene Fornes's *Molly's Dream* and Jeff Weiss's *A Funny Walk Home*. Stephen Bottoms's vivid evocation of the grand adventure of Off-Off Broadway has woken and broken my heart. It is difficult to believe that he was not there alongside me to breathe the caffeine-nicotine-alkaloid-steeped air."
-Robert Patrick, author of *Kennedy's Children* and *Temple Slave*

Few books address the legendary age of 1960s off-off Broadway theater. Fortunately, Stephen Bottoms fills that gap with *Playing Underground*---the first comprehensive history of the roots of off-off Broadway.

This is a theater whose legacy is still felt today: it was the launching pad for many leading contemporary theater artists, including Sam Shepard, Maria Irene Fornes, and others, and it was a pivotal influence on improv comedy and shows like *Saturday Night Live*.

Off-off Broadway groups such as the Living Theatre, La Mama, and Caffe Cino captured the spirit of nontraditional theater with their edgy, unscripted, boundary-crossing subjects. Yet, as Bottoms discovers, there is no one set of truths about off-off Broadway to uncover; the entire scene was always more a matter of competing perceptions than a singular, concrete reality.

No other author has managed to illuminate this shifting tableau as Bottoms does. Through interviews with dozens of the era's leading playwrights, performers, directors, and critics, he unearths a countercultural theater movement that was both influential and transforming-yet ephemeral and quintessentially of its moment.

Playing Underground will be a definitive work on the subject, offering a complete picture of an important but little-studied period in American theater.

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