

BACKSTORY

**THE
CHILDREN'S
HOUR**



Your behind-the-scenes look at TimeLine productions

**YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.**

TimeLine
Theatre Company

Dear Friends,

I write these words to you on the morning after the first rehearsal of our production of Lillian Hellman's landmark drama *The Children's Hour*, with many lines and thoughts still haunting me.

Hellman said her play is about the power of a lie, and most accounts of the story tend to focus on the character of Mary, a precocious young girl who lies about the relationship between her two headmistresses. But as director Nick Bowling told the cast last night, our production aims to go beyond being merely about the lies that are told about one another. It hopefully also will examine the lies we tell ourselves, the deceptions that prevent us from being true to ourselves. Because those are the lies that surely have the gravest consequences.

And with those thoughts dancing in my head I heard Hellman's play with fresh ears. This story, which often has been labeled (for better or worse) a melodrama, instead rang out as a searing tragedy.

The play also resonates as a fascinating allegory for Hellman's life. I don't mean to imply — as some have — that this is an autobiographical work that comments on the author's sexuality. In fact, you'll read in this *Backstory* that Hellman's inspiration for the play was a 19th Century court case in Scotland. Rather, *The Children's Hour* gets at the heart of who Lillian Hellman was — a pioneer who stayed true to herself despite tremendous adversity.

Her career was about breaking down barriers for women in the American theater and shattering perceptions of taboo topics. When *The Children's Hour* premiered in 1934, it was boycotted by the Pulitzer Prize committee, shunned by many producers and labeled as scandalous. It was widely speculated that the play would implode on Broadway in a firestorm of controversy. Despite those predictions, Hellman was ultimately celebrated by critics and audiences who were deeply moved by the play's story and awed by its author's indisputable talent.

And Hellman was just getting started. She became a major voice in the theater over the next 20 years with a string of plays that probed history and captured the trials of the American family. Yet despite a remarkable run of productions in the 1930s and '40s, her most famous moment lay ahead.

It took place in 1952, far from Broadway, in a Washington, D.C., hearing room. Called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, she was asked to name names and betray her friends. Instead, just as her characters struggle to do in *The Children's Hour*, Lillian Hellman chose to be true to herself. Amid the politicians and critics who relentlessly tried to make her into something other than who she was, she defiantly proclaimed in a letter to the committee:

"I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions."



We at TimeLine are proud to pay homage to that sentiment — and to Hellman's body of work. Hers is a voice worth celebrating. We're also delighted to produce *The Children's Hour* concurrently with the Writers' Theatre production of Hellman's *Another Part of the Forest*, directed by William Brown, a frequent TimeLine collaborator.

We also are pleased to add a special production to our schedule to further honor Hellman's legacy. Please join us for the one-woman play *Lillian*, by William Luce, which is based on her life and writings. *Lillian* will open Nov. 12 and run through Dec. 11, playing Sunday and Monday evenings. Read more about this bonus production in this *Backstory*.

Lillian Hellman has given us much to discuss this fall at the theater. Through this edition of *Backstory*, our lobby displays, our discussion series and, of course, the plays themselves, we hope to shine new light on her remarkable career and lifetime of bravery. I look forward to engaging you in the conversation.

Best Wishes,

On **Sunday, November 19**, immediately following that day's performance of *The Children's Hour*, TimeLine will host our Sunday Scholar Series. This free one-hour panel discussion will feature experts talking about the themes and issues of our plays.

Scheduled panelists for *The Children's Hour* are:

Colleen Doody

An assistant professor of history at DePaul University, Doody's research and teaching interests include a focus on 20th century America. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia.

Sharon P. Holland

An associate professor of African

American studies, American studies and gender studies at Northwestern University, Holland's teachings include the areas of sexuality/gender and culture. She is a graduate of Princeton University and holds a Ph.D. in English and African American Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Jonathan Sherman

A licensed clinical psychologist, Dr. Sherman received his doctorate degree in psychology from Northwestern University, where he is a clinical instructor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences. Dr. Sherman has a special interest in working with adolescent clients and their families.

The Sunday Scholars panel is moderated by TimeLine Board member **Peter H. Kuntz**, managing director of programs and production for the Chicago Humanities Festival.

Please note that you do not need to see the November 19 performance of *The Children's Hour* to attend this event!

To confirm event start time or for further information, call (773) 281-8463 x 24 or visit www.timelinetheatre.com.

Scheduled panelists are subject to change.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS, LOBBY DISPLAYS & STUDY GUIDES

Stay after performances on **Thursday, November 9; Sunday, November 12; and Thursday, November 16**, for our free **post-show discussions**.

Moderated by the production dramaturg, these brief, informal discussions are your opportunity to hear from the cast and production team about their experiences, ask questions about and comment on the performance and engage your fellow audience members in a conversation about the themes and issues of the play.

PLUS ... don't miss our **historical lobby displays**, available for perusal before and after each performance and at intermission. They also can be downloaded at www.timelinetheatre.com.

Also online, you may obtain a **production study guide**, our compilation of all the historical background, contextual articles and additional resources collected during production of *The Children's Hour*.

We hope these resources enhance your theater-going experience at TimeLine!



Panel from the historical lobby display prepared for *The Children's Hour*.

Backstory Credits

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At age 25, Lillian Hellman thought her writing career was over. She had published several mediocre “lady-writer stories” — she described them as “the kind where the man puts his fork down and the woman knows it’s all over.” Deciding she was no good, she quit writing and took jobs reading others’ manuscripts; at the very least, she could recognize a lack of talent.

Enter her lover, writer Dashiell Hammett.

As he was seeking inspiration for a new story, he came across William Roughead’s *Bad Companions*, a book on infamous British court cases. One chapter in particular, “Closed Doors, or The Great Drumsheugh Case,” seemed excellent fodder for a play. Hammett passed the material to Hellman, and her work on *The Children’s Hour* began.

“Closed Doors” tells the story of a scandal in 1810 Edinburgh, Scotland. A young girl accused the two headmistresses of her girls’ boarding school of having “an inordinate affection” for one another. The girl’s grandmother, believing the women to be an affront to decency, removed her from the school. Within two days, every student had been withdrawn from the school, without reason. When the headmistresses finally learned that they’d been accused of being lovers, they sued the grandmother for

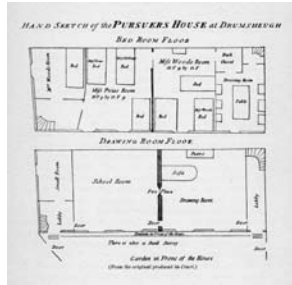
libel and spent the rest of their lives trying to restore their names and recover financially.

Hellman recognized a good story and borrowed from history for her play. All of this is straight from Hellman’s source:

Jane Pirie and Marianne Woods, the headmistresses, built their

Hellman recognized a good story and borrowed from history for her play.

school from scratch, investing time, money and effort — an atypical move for women of the times. Woods’ Aunt Ann had been a moderately successful actress, performing alongside the famous Sarah Siddons. Moreover, she was constantly at odds with Pirie over control of the school. For example, Pirie and Woods would return to school after a holiday to find that Ann had redecorated, and, on more than one occasion, Pirie was unable to



charge items on house accounts that remained in Ann’s name. Accusations were indeed made against the headmistresses by young Jane Cumming. Her grandmother, Dame Helen Cumming Gordon, once a patron of the school, single-handedly orchestrated the students’ mass exodus by writing their parents and informing them of the moral threat. Pirie and Woods sued, but the libel action failed initially; the school never reopened.

Above: Marianne Woods’ Aunt Ann (left) acting alongside the great actress, Sarah Siddons. (Kay’s Portraits, 1784)

Left: A rendering of the schoolhouse, drawn to indicate the positions of beds, settees, doors and keyholes. (Original Court Drawing, *Bad Companions*)

Equally interesting are Hellman’s digressions from history.

In transforming Jane Cumming into Mary Tilford, for example, she left out an intriguing bit. In actuality, the girl was a dark-skinned half-Indian. Dame Cumming Gordon’s son, George, had fathered Jane with a 15-year-old Indian girl while on business there. Suddenly taken ill and knowing it would not go well for Jane in Scottish society when he died, he contacted a distant cousin in Calcutta, sent him a large sum of money and asked that he keep watch over her. The cousin enrolled Jane in a Christian boarding school in Calcutta, but it was not long before she complained of being mistreated by other students because of her race. After a few more moves and ill-fitting schools, Jane was sent to Scotland to live with her grandmother, who

brudgungly took her in, likely to appease the guilt she felt after her son’s death. Within a few weeks, Jane was enrolled at Pirie’s and Wood’s school where, by Roughead’s account, she felt “odd and unwanted.”

Why Hellman chose to obscure this point is unclear. Her memoirs reveal a life-long fascination with malice and seemingly motiveless evil-doing. In a play rife with lies and illicit love, Hellman perhaps felt that the race issue would only complicate matters, supplying a legitimate gripe for a young girl whom she clearly wanted to portray as needlessly destructive.

Other changes she made seem calculated to mitigate the lesbian theme and maximize the catastrophic effects of the lie:

- The character of Karen, one of the teachers, is given a fiancé; her impending marriage, for Hellman, is a casualty of the scandal — and insurance against accusations of lesbianism (in and outside the play).
- Karen and Martha, the other teacher, have separate bedrooms, whereas their real-life counterparts allegedly slept, and had intimate relations, in the same rooms as their young wards. Mary thus has to work harder to make her story plausible, which

involves an invented subplot in which she blackmails a classmate, Rosalie, into corroborating the rumors.

- The schoolgirls are presented as too innocent to know of lesbianism, so Hellman “educates” them by way of a salacious French novel, plus creates dialogue about Martha’s “unnatural” affection that they can overhear.
- There also is a death in the play and — in a quite different ending — Mary’s accusations are revealed to be untrue.
- The collateral damage extends to Mary’s discredited grandmother, repentant in the play’s final moments in a way that Dame Cumming Gordon was never forced to be, as her charges stuck.

Hellman went to great lengths to write a play about the potency of a lie. But then she seemingly undercut her intentions with one last third-act historical deviation: Martha admits to Karen that she has desired her, as the girls suggested.

For all of Hellman’s insistence that *The Children’s Hour* was not about lesbians, this final revelation sets the stage for a confrontation between the two women that gives the play a fascinating power over its audience.



Left: Romantic friendship, which involved kissing, physical intimacy and long-term commitments to one another, was not uncommon among 19th Century women. (Engraving by J. Thomson after painting by George Henry Harlow)

- 1905** Lillian Hellman is born June 20 in New Orleans. She will be an only child.
- 1911** Her family moves to New York City when she is a young girl, but still spends half the year in New Orleans. She attends schools in both cities.
- 1925** Hellman’s first job is reading manuscripts for a New York publisher. This brings her into contact with press agent (and later playwright) Arthur Kober. They are married New Year’s Eve.
- 1926** Hellman is published for the first time — as a short-story writer — in *The Paris Corner* magazine.
- 1927** Struggling financially, she takes on a few more jobs. She writes book and reads scripts for several Broadway producers. An interest in the theater is born.
- 1930** Hellman and Kober move to Hollywood, where she is hired by MGM to read screenplays. That fall, she meets author Dashiell Hammett.
- 1931** Hellman divorces Kober, moves back to New York City and lives with Hammett in the Sutton Hotel. She continues writing short stories while he works on a novel.
- 1933** Inspired by a true courtroom story that Hammett brought to her attention, Hellman begins writing *The Children’s Hour*. That fall, she takes a job reading plays for producer-director Herman Chumlin, with whom she is soon romantically involved. When he asks him the best play she has read, she asks for a copy of *The Children’s Hour*, minus production, and Hellman reveals herself as the author.
- 1934** This is a big year for Hammett and Hellman. In January, *The Thin Man* is published, and Hammett claims that his character of Nora Charles is based on his beloved Lillian. *The Children’s Hour* premieres Nov. 20 at the Maxine Elliott Theatre in New York City and runs for 691 performances.

Lillian Hellman's romantic life could be described as an exercise in "keeping one's options open" — this despite being married to playwright Arthur Kober from 1925 to 1931. She had many lovers, including publisher Ralph Ingersoll, American diplomat John Melby and the original director of *The Children's Hour*, Herman Shumlin. Even at age 79 on the night before her death in 1984, she is rumored to have propositioned a male guest at the dinner party she was attending.

But the man who most frequently captured her attentions — and on many days, her heart — was writer Dashiell Hammett, the famed author of *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Thin Man* and many other hard-boiled detective stories. They had an on-again, off-again affair that spanned 30 years until his death in 1961.

The pair met at a party in autumn 1930; they began conversing about T.S. Eliot over appetizers and soon found themselves in his parked automobile, where they covered literature, politics and Hollywood until sunrise. Less than a year later, Hellman was divorced, and they were living together in a New York City hotel.

Not surprisingly, words continued to play a central role in the years that followed. Often apart — in separate countries, even — they were avid letter writers. Hammett was a fervent

encourager of Hellman's writing and would compose detailed critiques that often sharpened her craft. She was grateful for his patience and brutal honesty: "Without that, I don't think I would have done much." In the final years of his life, a bed-ridden Hammett, already shy and diffident, relied on Hellman to be his voice to friends, admirers and interviewers.

Not that their romance was always sunny. They never married, and had to turn a blind eye to each other's occasional dalliances. His frequent drinking binges and her temper also made it impossible for them to live together year round, until he became ill. Their political differences were a major point of contention. While Hellman refused to claim alliances, Hammett was a proud radical. Authorities may not have been wrong to accuse him of espionage and communist sympathies. She was afraid he might be jailed again for his repeated defiance, while he forbade her to read the cartoon "Li'l Abner" because he found it fascist.



Dashiell Hammett and Lillian Hellman. (photo by Dashiell Hammett)

Still, over the years, something powerful was forged between them that, ironically, transcended their chatty beginning. A beautifully inarticulate Hellman told Bill Moyers after Hammett's death: "It took a long time to find out, but we both knew in the end ... long before the end ... what we felt. We didn't talk about it a great deal. We both were very ... I think we were good to each other. I think. I'm sure."

"We both knew in the end ... what we felt. ... I think we were good to each other. I think. I'm sure."

— Lillian Hellman on Dashiell Hammett in a television interview after his death

Though Hellman insisted that *The Children's Hour* was about a lie and its effects, the 1934 theater world was abuzz with another "L" word, one the playwright fervently disavowed: lesbianism.

From the first week of rehearsal, producer Lee Shubert badgered director Herman Shumlin: "This play could land us all in jail." His anxiety was well founded; in 1926, a play with lesbian characters entitled *The Captive* had been closed by police and its leading ladies carted to jail. No surprise, then, that several prominent actresses turned down the roles of Martha and Karen before Shumlin found his cast.

And no wonder, too, that every precaution was taken to ensure a "decent" production. Shumlin cast women over 18 as the schoolgirls, so as not to expose children to the mature subject matter. In addition, to give the authorities as few reasons as possible to shut down the show, actors were forbidden to smoke backstage, a safety code regulation that usually was ignored.

Despite a string of good reviews and the fact that the word "lesbian" was never spoken onstage, the play's scandalous reputation followed it. *The Children's Hour* was banned in Boston in 1935 and, after a lawsuit for \$250,000 against the city failed, didn't play there until it arrived on the silver screen in 1961. In Chicago, Hellman sat behind the censor

at the board review to see if she could gauge what response the play was getting. As Martha confessed her love to Karen onstage, Hellman noticed the censor whispering to her friend. Anxious to hear, Hellman slid to the edge of her seat in time to catch, "I really like what she's wearing." Despite the vote of confidence for the costume designer, the play was banned in Chicago until 1953. In London, several enterprising directors got around the Lord Chamberlain's ban by staging performances in private clubs and homes, away from the public eye.

The "L" word's most damaging effect became apparent in spring 1935 when the Pulitzer Prize committee passed over *The Children's Hour* in favor of Zoe Akin's *The Old Maid*. Reportedly, the Rev. William Lyon Phelps, a committee member, had refused to see it. Moreover, the committee broke its rules when it awarded

the Pulitzer Prize for drama to an adapted — not original — script. In response, New York theater critics established the Drama Critics' Circle Award to protest the sham and any future slights by the Pulitzer Committee.

One critic took issue with Hellman for not exploring the lesbian theme more deeply. In *The Times of London* newspaper, the critic regretted that "it [was] not until the third act, and then only in a brief scene, that Martha has a chance to communicate that depth of passion which is hinted at in the opening and might, if it had been fully developed, have made the play even more moving than it is."

This lone voice hints at an opinion contrary to the strident prudery of the day and foreshadows some of the negotiations Hellman would be able to make in adapting her work for the 1952 theater revival and the 1936 and 1961 screenplays.

A scene from the original 1934 production of *The Children's Hour*. (Theatre Collection, Museum of the City of New York)



1936 In March, *These Three*, the sanitized movie version of *The Children's Hour*, opens. A heterosexual love triangle has been substituted for Hellman's more scandalous intrigue. In London, the play is banned by the Lord Chamberlain — but is given a private performance at the Gate Theatre.

1937 On her way to Moscow to attend a theater festival, Hellman stops in Berlin and delivers \$50,000 to a childhood friend who is fighting fascists in an underground movement. She begins taking an interest in the Spanish Civil War, securing financial backing for another friend's documentary film.

1939 Hellman's *The Little Foxes* opens Feb. 15 and runs for 410 performances in Chicago.

1941 Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* opens April 1 and runs for 328 performances. It wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as the best American play of the year.

1942 At age 48, Hammett enlists in the Army and is stationed in New Jersey. Shortly before he leaves, Hellman's first four plays are published by Random House.

1944-45 While in Moscow attending rehearsals of productions of her plays, Hellman spends two weeks on the front with the Russian army. Though the Russians are America's allies at the time, this visit will prompt raised eyebrows in the U.S. six years later.

1946 Fed up with directors, Hellman directs one of her plays for the first time. Another part of the Forest opens Nov. 20 and runs for 182 performances.

1948 Hellman supports the Progressive Party candidate for the first time. Wallace, and files for President. Henry Yugoslavie's communist dictator, Josip Tito. She is labeled pro-communist by the American press.

the summons

In 1952, Hellman experienced what she called “the power of a lie” firsthand when she was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) for suspected involvement in the Communist Party. The subpoena came as no surprise; she had been feeling the financial effects of an unspoken blacklist in Hollywood since 1948, and Hammett had served jail time for refusing to supply the names of contributors to a “Red” organization a year before.

What did shock Hellman was the behavior of people she had

known for years. In a bizarre “fraternity of the betrayers and the betrayed,” as she put it, accused theater folk phoned friends before testifying to let them know that they would be named as a communist. In many cases, the soon-to-be-implicated would give their permission, as if to say, “I don’t blame you for needing to keep your job and make money.” Hellman was equally disturbed by the response of liberal “clowns,” as she called them — people who took to the hills or refused to stand up for the truth when fingers were pointed:

“Few people acted large enough for drama and not pleasantly enough for comedy.”

Artistically, Hellman’s response was to revamp *The Children’s Hour* for a revival later that year — reworking it into a witch-hunt play that bristled with new relevance. But not before she composed a letter to the HUAC that stymied her interrogators and somehow prevented her from being sentenced. It is addressed to John S. Wood, the Democratic representative from Georgia, then the head of the committee. Here are excerpts:

Dear Mr. Wood:

As you know, I am under subpoena to appear before your Committee ...

I am most willing to answer all questions about myself. I have nothing to hide from your Committee and there is nothing in my life of which I am ashamed. ...

But I am advised by counsel that if I answer the Committee’s questions about myself, I must also answer questions about other people, and that if I refuse to do so, I can be cited for contempt. ... I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who, in my past association with them, were completely innocent of any talk or any action that was disloyal or subversive. ... To hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year’s fashions, even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable place in any political group. ...

I am prepared to waive the privilege against self-incrimination ... if your Committee will agree to refrain from asking me to name other people. If the Committee is unwilling to give me this assurance, I will be forced to plead the privilege of the Fifth Amendment at the hearing.

Sincerely yours,

Lillian Hellman

the quotes

Excerpts from an interview with Lucius Beebe, *New York Herald Tribune*; Dec. 13, 1936:

“You have no notion of how hard it is to retain an idea that you want to put across all through the business of writing a play. You may have a clearly defined point of view and something, as we say with a titter, vital on your mind when you sit down to those nice new pencils and that nice fresh copy paper. But when you get all through and write ‘curtain’ for the last time, only faintly penciling in cries of ‘author, author’ in a moment of unjustified optimism, where are those fine ideas? ... Something happens to them, and when the lights go on you had better send for Hercule Poirot. Nobody but a competent detective can find them.”

“[The theater] has one great warrant for its being, one excuse for its continued existence — the theater can survive as a place for the expression and exchange of ideas. ... And you can present an idea for the consideration of intelligent audiences, which ... is completely outside the gaudiest opium dreams of possibility in Hollywood. They wouldn’t know an idea if they saw it on the Coast, and if by any chance they should recognize it the film



Above: Lillian Hellman (photo by Irving Penn)

people would be frightened right out of their suede shoes.”

“[Hollywood] isn’t as bad if you’re working there. Of course, it’s unbearable to any civilized person as a mere visitor, but with something to do it’s no worse than being in jail and working all day in the jute mill. It keeps your mind off things.”

Excerpts from an interview with Bill Moyers, *National Educational Television*, April 1974:

“I’m not sure why writers should have remarkable personalities, or, they’re not actors, they’re

not society people; they’re not automobiles, there’s nothing, no reason for them to be seen so much or be so interesting. Most very good writers I think are rather uninteresting in a room.”

“I think I just started to write plays because I didn’t know what else to write. I knew I wasn’t a short story writer.”

Excerpt from an interview with Harry Gilroy, *The New York Times*; Dec. 14, 1952:

“One thing that has struck me about *The Children’s Hour* is that anyone young ordinarily writes autobiographically. Yet I picked on a story that I could treat with complete impersonality. I hadn’t even been to boarding school.”

“The theater can survive as a place for the expression and exchange of ideas”

1950 *The Children’s Hour* still banned from public performance in London, receives another private production there, at New Boltons, a theater club.

1951 Hammett is sentenced to six months in prison for refusing to name people who had contributed to a reportedly pro-communist organization.

1952 On May 21, Hellman testifies before the House Un-American Activities Committee. As promised in a letter written beforehand, she speaks only of her activities and opinions, steadfastly refusing to discuss other people. She is blacklisted in Hollywood and — aware of the irony — directs a revival of *The Children’s Hour* on Broadway for 189 performances.

1953 When questioned by Sen. Joseph McCarthy about his involvement in espionage, Hammett pleads the Fifth Amendment. After a 12-year ban, *The Children’s Hour* receives its first production in Chicago.

1956 *The Children’s Hour* receives yet another private production in London.

1960 Hellman wins another New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for *Atteridge*, which runs for 55 performances at the Hubson Theatre. She is elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

1961 Hammett dies of lung cancer, Jan. 10. The second film version of *The Children’s Hour* — now using the play’s name — opens. It stars Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MaClaine and James Garner.

1966 *The Big Knockover*, an edition of Hammett’s fiction, is published with a loving and intimate introduction penned by Hellman.

1969 Hellman’s *An Unfinished Woman: A Memoir* is published. The following year, it wins the National Book Award in the Arts and Letters category.

The cast for *The Children's Hour* includes 14 actors, seven of whom are ages 10 - 15 and portray students at the boarding school where the play takes place. As rehearsals began, TimeLine's Artistic Director PJ Powers asked about how they got involved in the theater and how they landed their roles. Following are excerpts of their answers; read the complete interviews at www.timelinetheatre.com.

- Mia Akers, 13, plays Peggy
- Rayna Ben-Zeev, 13, plays Helen
- Olivia Cygan, 12, plays Catherine
- Zanny Laird, 14, plays Mary
- Laura Noigebauer, 15, plays Rosalie
- Grace Parker, 10, plays Lois
- Natalie Watts, 10, plays Evelyn

Tell me about your experience auditioning for this production of *The Children's Hour*.

Olivia: I think I'm correct in assuming that, for most young actors, the audition process is one that is both thrilling and nerve-racking. I entered TimeLine with as positive an attitude as can be sustained, knowing that what I was preparing to do was potentially life-altering. Immediately upon seeing the theater, however, I fell in love. Even through my jitters, I could tell this was someplace special, and that calmed me down slightly. I went in for the actual reading and got positive vibes, which definitely boosted my confidence. When I got home, there was already a message on our machine, asking if I could come in for a callback. I screamed, went in for a second audition, and the rest is history.

Grace: I went into the audition feeling like I was the youngest one there. You're standing there between two kids who are taller than you or five years older. I thought I would get called back, but after the callback I wasn't sure I would get cast.

Rayna: It was really fun. It was different than my other audition experiences because we were asked to be as free as we wanted to be. It meant that if we thought the character would walk on tables or push over chairs (and I did), we could do that.

Zanny: I loved how Nick challenged me to think about how my character was feeling. At the callbacks we went further by using chairs and props to throw around in the scene. We experimented with the characters more and how they interacted with the other characters.

Mia: I was really interested in the play because for once it wasn't a musical and the material was so raw yet relatable. I had the opportunity to audition with new people as well as old friends. There were so many girls that were auditioning, and I thought, if I made it that would be incredible. That night, I received a

“When I got home, there was already a message on our machine, asking if I could come in for a callback. I screamed, went in for a second audition, and the rest is history.”

— Olivia Cygan, 12

phone call stating that I'd gotten a callback. When I came back, I felt so honored to audition again and enjoyed doing the scene with the girls I was with. The director gave us really good insight on what was going on in the scene, and I was able to go from there. It gave me a chance to learn how to be a better actor and really grow more in a serious scene.

How did you respond when you found out you had been cast?

Natalie: I was very excited and couldn't wait until [my mom] called you back. I was afraid that if she didn't call back right away you would give the part to someone else.

Mia: I've got to tell you, it was one of the best birthday gifts I ever had! I turned 13 the day after the callbacks. You called my mom and left a voicemail and I remember I had been out with my dad and didn't find out until about 10:30 that night. I was shocked, and I was screaming and my mom was a little mad because she had been sleeping. I had heard so many great things about TimeLine Theatre. And all the girls who tried out with me [were cast and that] made it more exciting for me.

Grace: I was just really happy and started saying "YES! GREAT!"

Zanny: You called me on the morning of my birthday to offer me the part of Mary. I was so shocked and exhilarated to get the call. It was the best birthday present I could have received.

Laura: I was really excited. This will be my first professional show.

Rayna: I jumped up and down with joy. I was at sleepover camp when I found out. I wrote home every day asking my parents if they had heard anything yet. The day I found out, it made me feel proud of myself and confident. Everyone at camp was happy for me. People I didn't even know would come up to me and congratulate me for getting into *The Children's Hour*.

How did you get interested in acting?

Laura: I've always loved being on stage, from when I was a young girl until now. Theater is my life.

Zanny: I went to my first audition at age 9 and landed a role in *The American Girl's Circle of Friends*. I always loved singing and dancing, and this show was the perfect introduction for me to professional theater. I quickly found myself doing other plays while at American Girl and later performed roles in feature films and a radio drama. My passion for acting continues to grow stronger with each role, and I feel I learn so much from the other actors that I perform with.

Natalie: I have been playing pretend and acting-out stories since I can remember. When my mom would try teaching me some type of sport, I would just sit down and tell her I would wait until she was all done playing so we could do a story. I was always the lead girl's role, and my mom had to be everyone else!

Mia: I have been really passionate about theater for most of my life and was always singing or acting around the house. I would watch tapes of some of my kiddie movies and TV shows, and my parents were amazed that I had memorized all the lines of certain movies and episodes. When I was 6, my parents signed me up for theater camp at the Beverly Arts Center in Chicago, and I was one of the youngest ones getting big parts. From there I got an agent



Mary O'Dowd as Lily Mortar (left) and Zanny Laird as Mary during a rehearsal of *The Children's Hour*.

1973 Pentimento, her second memoir, is published. Four years later, the movie *Lullaby* opens. Starring Jane Fonda as Hellman, the movie is based on a chapter from this book.

1976 Volume three of Hellman's memoirs, *Scoundrel Time*, is published.

1980 Hellman files a defamation suit against writer Mary McCarthy for comments she made on *The Dick Cavett Show*. "Every word [Hellman] writes is a lie, including 'ard' and 'the.'" (Hellman died before the suit was settled.)

1984 Hellman dies of cardiac arrest.

1986 *Lullaby*, the one-woman play about Hellman's life by William Luce, premieres on Broadway.



“On way my back from the theater, I said ‘Mama, I want to be an actress!’ That would probably be my favorite [theater] experience.” — Grace Parker, 10

and did some modeling and commercials and began going out on theater auditions, and the rest is history. I really just had a passion for acting and would love to do theater camps as opposed to sports or dance camps.

Olivia: When I was in elementary school, I had an amazing fine-arts teacher, and that may have begun to trigger my love for acting and singing. Over the summer going into 4th grade I took a “Summer on Broadway” day camp at the Music Institute of Chicago, and I think that’s when I recognized, personally, that I belong in the theater.

Rayna: I ice-skated for many years, but what I looked forward to all year was performing in the ice show. I wouldn’t get as nervous as the other girls, and after each show I would ask to perform some more. I would have a happy feeling inside during the performances. This made me want to audition for a play. I auditioned for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and got the part of Lucy. I have loved acting ever since.

Grace: I guess I like acting because it’s very open. When you’re acting there’s almost no such thing as doing too much. You can express yourself.

What are some of your favorite theater experiences, as an audience member and as an actor?

Natalie: My parents love theater, too, so I am able to go to a lot of shows. But my favorite audience experience was just recently. I had already seen *Wicked* twice. But I won two free tickets for a weeknight performance, and I wanted to take my friend Louisa, who has been dying to see it. We didn’t think her parents would let her go on a school night and with no chaperone inside the theater. But they did! My mom escorted us in and then went to

Argo Tea Café next door. We felt so grown up!

Mia: Some of my favorite theater experiences as an audience member would probably be going to a Christmas show at the American Girl Place theater when I was 7. I loved the show and a couple of years later I began working there with some of the girls I’d seen in the show. I also loved *Lion King* and *Wicked*.

Laura: My favorite theater experience was in New York City, where I learned all of the dances for the Lionesses in *Lion King* from an actress in the show. My grandma has been taking me to the theater since I was 3.

Olivia: I love the stage, and any exposure to that, regardless of whether I’m in the audience or performing, I relish. I’ve been fortunate enough to work with the Piven Theatre, and I’ve acted opposite, and have been directed by, Joyce Piven. I feel incredibly lucky to have had that opportunity. In terms of actually watching a performance, the first professional musical I saw was *Hairspray*, and that was nothing short of thrilling.

Zanny: One of my favorite theater experiences was performing the part of Electra’s Past in



Bohemian Theatre’s production of the Greek tragedy, Sophocles’ *Electra*. I portrayed the soul of Electra as a young girl as she wrestled with tragedy and betrayal within her family. I was on stage for the entire show and needed to stay in character and respond to all of the actor’s actions and emotions, especially those of the heroine, Electra. As the only young adult in the show, I learned so much from all the older actors, and I came out of it with a great appreciation for Greek tragedy.

Rayna: I took a trip to New York and saw four Broadway plays. They were *Bridge and Tunnel*, *Sweeney Todd*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Hairspray*. They were all very different from one another, and the acting was fantastic. *Bridge and Tunnel* was where one actress played 15 different ethnic personalities. She played old people, young people and people with different accents. Each time she switched characters, she only changed one piece of clothing. This impressed me because the actress really became each character she played.

Her posture changed, her tone of voice changed, and the way she presented herself changed. This really taught me a lot as an actress on how to portray different characters.

Grace: As an audience member, my favorite memory is when I was 4 and I saw my first Broadway show, and it was *Beauty and the Beast*. And on way my back from the theater, I said “Mama, I want to be an actress!” That would probably be my favorite experience.

Above: Mia Akers (from far left), Rayna Ben-Zeev, Olivia Cygan, Zanny Laird, Laura Noigebauer, Grace Parker and Natalie Watts.

Below: Olivia Cygan as Catherine (from left), Mia Akers as Peggy and director Nick Bowling rehearse a scene from *The Children’s Hour*.



Left: Natalie Watts (left) as Evelyn and Laura Noigebauer as Rosalie in a scene from *The Children’s Hour*.



“The members of the new TimeLine Theatre Company are gambling on history. They’re betting they can find a niche for themselves in Chicago’s crowded theater scene by specializing in history plays — and unsettling ones at that. ... Time — and the vagaries of history — will tell.”

So wrote Patrick Reardon in the *Chicago Tribune*, May 20, 1998.

The occasion was a feature article commemorating TimeLine’s first production: *Summit Conference*, by Robert David MacDonald.

The company had been founded a year before, in April 1997, when six artists — Nick Bowling, Brock Goldberg, Kevin Hagan, Juliet Hart, PJ Powers and Pat Tiedemann — had their first meeting.

With degrees from The Theatre School at DePaul University in multiple disciplines — acting, directing, playwriting/dramaturgy and design — the six sought to incorporate their diverse talents into a cohesive artistic vision for a new theater company. They discovered a shared interest in history and spent that first year developing a solid artistic and administrative structure from which to launch their first production.

Summit Conference was directed by Bowling and featured Hart, Powers and Tiedemann in the three-person cast. Set during the summer of 1941, the play



“... the auspicious craftsmanship of this TimeLine Theatre debut” —*Chicago Reader*

imagined a meeting between the mistresses of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, Eva Braun and Clara Petacci. Their tea party turns surreal when the ladies transform into the alter egos of their lovers and confront each other and the young guard chosen to watch over them.

With a budget of \$8,765, TimeLine produced *Summit Conference* at the Performance Loft Theater in the 2nd Unitarian Church, 656 W. Barry Ave., just two blocks north of the company’s current home. The play garnered several positive reviews and, while it played to small audiences (375 people saw the show during its six-week run), the company was proud of its successful debut and looked forward to its next step.

“We don’t want to be a one-shot company,” said Bowling in the *Chicago Tribune* article. “We want to stick around.”

Above: Pat Tiedemann as Clara Petacci (from left), PJ Powers as the guard and Juliet Hart as Eva Braun in Summit Conference. The play featured scenic, lighting and costume design by Brock Goldberg, dramaturgy by Kevin Hagan, and was produced by Lara Goetsch.

Below Left: TimeLine’s original logo, designed by Kevin Hagan.

Below: Tiedemann (from left), Hart and Powers.



In conjunction with our production of *The Children’s Hour*, TimeLine is thrilled to present the one-woman show *Lillian*, by William Luce, directed by TimeLine Associate Artist Louis Contey and featuring Janet Ulrich Brooks in the title role.

Based on the autobiographical writings of Lillian Hellman, *Lillian* premiered on Broadway in January 1986 starring Tony Award-winner Zoe Caldwell.

The play is set in the waiting room of a New York hospital where Hellman awaits the death of her longtime companion Dashiell Hammett. As she waits, she reflects on her memories — growing up in New Orleans and New York, her successes

10 performances only!

“Ribald, poignant entertainment” —*Time*

LILLIAN

by William Luce | directed by Louis Contey
featuring Janet Ulrich Brooks

and failures as an artist, her testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee and the myriad people and incidents that shaped her life. Described as “ribald, poignant entertainment” by *Time* and a “beautifully constructed union of intellect and emotion” by *The Washington Post*, *Lillian* is a compelling portrait of an artist and woman who made unforgettable contributions to the worlds of theater, literature and politics in America.

Janet Ulrich Brooks’ previous TimeLine credits include *A Man*

and *For All Seasons* (Alice More) and *Paragon Springs* (Widow Kroger). Other credits include work with Writers’ Theatre (*Doctor’s Dilemma* and *Seagull*), Pegasus Players (*Still Life* and *Broadway Bound*), Strawdog Theatre (*Marathon 33*) and City Lit, Stage Left and Live Bait theaters. She will play multiple roles in *Huck Finn* at Steppenwolf Theatre in February. Brooks is also a freelance teaching artist, currently with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and Writers’ Theatre.

Read more about *Lillian* at www.timelinetheatre.com.

Left: Janet Ulrich Brooks during the first read-through of Lillian.

Lillian Performance Details

10 performances only!
Nov. 12 - Dec. 11, 2006

Sunday & Monday at 7 pm

Tickets \$10

To purchase tickets, visit www.timelinetheatre.com or call 773.281.TIME (8463) x24

The Production Team

Alex Wren Meadows: *Costume Designer*
Charles Cooper: *Lighting Designer*
Mike Tutaj: *Sound Designer*
Holly Birdsong: *Stage Manager*
Benjamin Thiem: *Producer*

Backstory Photo Captions

Pictured on front cover: Actors Barbara L.W. Myers and Mechelle Moe (from left); scenic design model by Brian Sidney Bembridge; actors Ann Wakefield, Natalie Watts, Mechelle Moe, Grace Parker and

Olivia Cygan; actors Mechelle Moe and Halena Kays with director Nick Bowling.

Pictured on back cover: Actor Sean Sullivan (from left); Lillian Hellman research; dialect coach

Eva Breneman, lighting designer Jesse Klug, sound designer Kevin O’Donnell, scenic designer Brian Sidney Bembridge and costume designer Lindsey Pate; actor Grace Parker.



TIMELINE
THEATRE COMPANY

by LILLIAN HELLMAN

directed by NICK BOWLING

Inspired by a 19th Century legal case, Lillian Hellman's landmark drama premiered in 1934 to great acclaim amid tremendous controversy — the play was initially banned in Chicago (until 1953) and other major cities, and the Pulitzer Prize committee refused to attend. It tells the story of an angry student who accuses two female boarding-school teachers of having an affair, with devastating results. As their lives fall apart, the women struggle to clear their stained reputations amid a flurry of attacks and questions about the basis of the allegations. Director Nick Bowling promises a bold, innovative staging of this provocative classic.

NOVEMBER 5 - DECEMBER 17, 2006

The Cast (in alphabetical order)

Mia Akers: *Peggy*
 Rayna Ben-Zeev: *Helen*
 Joe Binder: *Grocery Boy*
 Olivia Cygan: *Catherine*
 Halena Kays: *Martha*
 Zanny Laird: *Mary*
 Mechelle Moe: *Karen*
 Barbara L.W. Myers: *Agatha*
 Laura Noigebauer: *Rosalie*
 Mary O'Dowd: *Lily Mortar*
 Grace Parker: *Lois*
 Sean Sullivan: *Dr. Joe Cardin*
 Ann Wakefield: *Amelia Tilford*
 Natalie Watts: *Evelyn*

The Production Team

Brian Sidney Bembridge: *Scenic Designer*
 Lindsey Pate: *Costume Designer*
 Jesse Klug: *Lighting Designer*
 Kevin O'Donnell: *Original Music @ Sound Designer*
 Lara Musard: *Props Designer*
 Jason Harrington: *Asst. Director*
 Craig Joseph: *Dramaturg*
 Jennifer Martin: *Stage Manager*
 Anna Nuzzo: *Asst. Stage Manager*
 Eva Breneman: *Dialect Coach*
 Seth Vermilyea: *Production Manager*
 Bob Groth: *Technical Director*
 Michael Smallwood: *Master Electrician*
 Rob Coleman: *Graphic Designer*
 Jim Keister: *Lobby Display Designer*
 Lara Goetsch: *Director of Marketing and Communications*
 PJ Powers: *Artistic Director*
 Brian Voelker: *Managing Director*



OCTOBER 2006

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
29	30	31				

NOVEMBER 2006

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
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5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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DECEMBER 2006

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
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10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17						

SHOW TIMES

THURSDAY & FRIDAY 8 PM

SATURDAY 4 PM & 8 PM

SUNDAY 2 PM

PREVIEWS & SELECT WEDNESDAYS 8 PM

- REGULAR PERFORMANCE
- PREVIEW PERFORMANCE
- OPENING PERFORMANCE (sold out)

- BRIEF POST-SHOW DISCUSSION *with cast @ production crew*
- SUNDAY SCHOLAR SERIES: *a one hour post-show panel discussion with experts on the themes and issues of the play*

Reserve your tickets now at (773) 281-TIME (8463) x24