

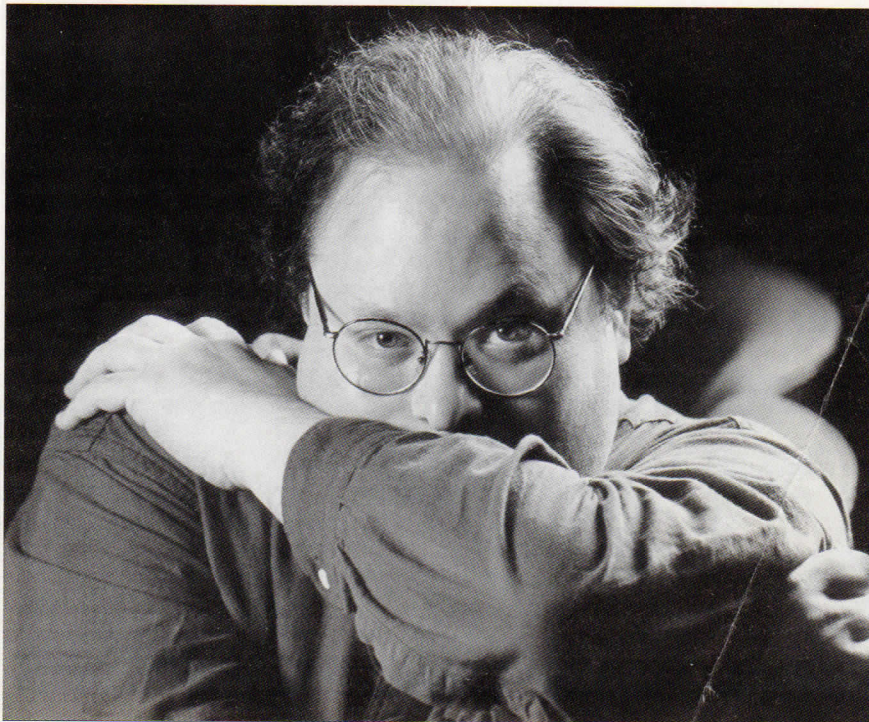
At the Gramercy Theatre

BROTHER TO BROTHER

Playwright Richard Greenberg returns to Roundabout Theatre Company with *The Dazzle*, which previews this month at the Gramercy.

BY GERARD RAYMOND

Playwright Richard Greenberg *t only seems as if I am very prolific," says Richard Greenberg, whose new play, The Dazzle, soon becomes the third production of his work to open in New York this season. "I've been writing steadily, but I figure it is at a rate of about one a year." The Dazzle, which begins performances this month at Roundabout's Gramercy Theatre, starring Reg Rogers and Peter Frechette, follows the 43-year-old playwright's Broadway adaptation of Strindberg's Dance of Death and the off-Broadway comedy Everett Beekin.*



CHRISTINE COTTER

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Brother to Brother

The Dazzle, which is directed by David Warren, is inspired by the lives of Homer and Langley Collyer, two notoriously eccentric brothers who lived in a ramshackle East Harlem mansion in the early part of the last century. One was a concert pianist and the other an admiralty lawyer. When they died in 1947 their bodies were discovered amidst mountains of junk and newspapers that

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had accumulated over decades. Greenberg, whose plays include *Eastern Standard*, *Three Days of Rain*, and Warren's 1999 Roundabout production of *Hurrah at Last*, described for Stagebill the genesis of his new piece and his fascination with its off-beat subject.

Paul Michael
Valley (left)
and Peter
Frechette in
Roundabout's
1999
production of
*Hurrah at
Last* by
Richard
Greenberg

STAGEBILL: You preface *The Dazzle* by saying you know almost nothing about the Collyer brothers. What did you know and how did you come to write about them?

RICHARD GREENBERG: I first heard about the Collyer brothers like most of the kids of my generation—when we were being advised to clean our rooms: "It's beginning to look like the Collyer brothers in here." It was a litany from my youth. I only knew that they were these crazy brothers who had a really messy house. Then, in the mid-1990s, David Warren directed a Broadway production of Philip Barry's *Holiday*, which I had to go and see because David was a friend. I thought I knew the play quite well and cared for it very little. But this production, which had Reg Rogers playing the part of the brother, was unexpectedly and deeply moving. I ended up thinking about it for about a week after. What happened was that in that production and in Reg's performance they located a vein of feeling, and suddenly it registered to me as a play about the mystery of who survives and who succumbs. When I told David about my reaction he almost idly suggested that I write a play where Reg and Peter Frechette [who had starred in *Eastern Standard* and *Hurrah at Last*] play brothers, because they suggest each other in a very interesting light. Soon after that, maybe that very day, I thought of the Collyer brothers.

I started writing the play about five years ago. I didn't have a computer then but my father did, and he got the contemporary accounts of the Collyer brothers' deaths—that was the research. Their deaths were famous because people went into their house. I think someone has written a book but I never got my hands on that. The few facts I learned were so suggestive that I didn't need to find out any more about them. Whatever they were was supplanted by what I wrote.

STAGEBILL: What drew you to this story?

GREENBERG: I know what it is to mess up a room. That seemed like a natural theme to me. I don't think I am as eccentric as some people think I am,

but I understand that eccentricity is a very specific logic—a logic that may not be immediately evident to the non-eccentric. Also, paralysis is a theme that resonates with me. And who better than the Collyer brothers to illustrate that? I was attracted to the idea of Reg and Peter playing these sort of loving, warring, exuberant brothers. I see them as these figures who are really romantically magnetized by the possibilities of life. That's why the play is called *The Dazzle* as opposed to "Two Creeps Skulking Through the Night," which is, I think, the way that people think of the Collyer brothers.

Many people don't sculpt out their own way of living. These people did. I think you can go very deep when you are an individual. As long as you are not living according to some procrustean plan, you are inventing all the time. So then you have to investigate your premises a lot. Now that is a homonym in terms of the Collyer brothers—their premises and their premises were very closely aligned.

STAGEBILL: *In other plays such as Three Days of Rain and Everett Beekin, you explore changes that occur over a period of time. Time plays a significant role in The Dazzle as well. The play's second act may come as something of a surprise for the viewer.*

GREENBERG: I only realized when we were auditioning for the third character of Millie that there is a huge leap between the first and the second acts. I do think more and more I have become interested in trying to construe time—psychologically, emotionally—trying to figure out how time goes by. Gaps are so fascinating because it is what we mostly have. You know, memory fails, we are lied to. I somehow want to dramatize the gaps. This play more than any other is about the passage of time and what people do with their time.

Gerard Raymond is a frequent contributor to Stagebill.



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