

Laurie Metcalf: I think it was *The Glass Menagerie* that got us a bit of our first real notice. Richard Christiansen came up to see it, and he was like, "Hey, everybody in Chicago, you have to make the trek up to Highland Park and see this play!" That was our first little blip on Chicago's radar.

Terry Kinney: *The Glass Menagerie* was absolutely one of the smallest, most perfect miracles I've ever been involved in. The poetry of [Tennessee] Williams was not interrupted with concept, it was just served. Laura [played by Laurie Metcalf] wasn't a romantic figure on any level. The selfishness of Tom [John Malkovich] was very much brought to the fore. I was playing the Gentleman Caller, and Laura would experience that moment where I say I have a girlfriend, then she walks to the Victrola. The audience weren't just moved. They were devastated. It was part and parcel with that small black box space, but it was also this trust that we had that we could go that far and still be OK because somehow the other actors onstage will still be holding you up.

Margie Marcus (founding board member, Steppenwolf Theatre): I was reading the *Tribune* one morning in August of '79. And I saw that there was a play being done in Highland Park by a group I had never heard of. My daughter was 15 years old at the time, and she was taking drama classes in high school, so I said, "Miriam, you're studying drama, there's a play right here in Highland Park, let's go see it."

Well [laughs]! I didn't know what had happened to me when I walked out after seeing John Malkovich, Laurie Metcalf, and Terry Kinney in *Glass Menagerie*. I just thought my head had exploded. I had never seen anybody like Laurie Metcalf in my life. Just that face on Laurie Metcalf while she was lighting those candles, I'll never forget it. I had never seen acting like that.

I was so taken with what I saw that the next morning I called the church, and I asked them to put me in touch with someone from this group. I can't remember to this day who it was, but I think it was Jeff who called me back and said, "What can we do for you?"

I said, "I don't know. I just know that I've never seen anything like this, and I have to be a part of it somehow. I have to help or do something or just be there." And I didn't care what they asked me to do. They could've asked me to sort papers. I would have done it.

He said, "Well, why don't we get together and talk about it?" Fast forward: I took John Malkovich, Russ Smith, and Jeff Perry to lunch at the Clark Street Café. And they said to me again, "What do you want?" I said, "I have to be involved." They said, "Well, would you like to be on our board?" It was a very small board at that time, and I said, "Of course!"

I don't remember much else about that lunch, except that Malkovich had parked across the street at the Jewel parking lot, where there was no parking allowed if you're not shopping. When we came out of that lunch, his car was gone. Lincoln Towing had towed it. Well, I had to take John over there to get his car, and of course he didn't have five cents, so I paid for him getting his car out of towing and off he went. That was my beginning with them.

Later, I invited 20 people to my home so I could sell subscriptions. I had a beautiful grand piano in my living room, and Jeff and Laurie came over. They sat in the curve of my piano on the floor. I had my mother's gorgeous silver candelabra, and they did a scene from *Glass Menagerie*.

I sold 20 subscriptions! I'll never forget it. It was the right timing. They were so brand new and so young and so anxious to make things happen, and I sold subscriptions to everyone that night. So that's one thing I'm very proud of.

Laurie Metcalf: That show got some Jeff nominations, so that was like the next little stepping stone to our saying, "Well, let's step out of our comfort zone, and let's try and head back into town."

Gary Sinise: The city of Chicago was interesting to us and it was always in the back of some of our minds, that at a certain point we were going to move out of the basement and go into the city permanently.

Austin Pendleton (actor; director; teacher; ensemble member, Steppenwolf Theatre, 1987-): The way I got involved with Steppenwolf was a fluke. It was a total fluke. I directed a play off-Broadway in New York called *Say Goodnight, Gracie* by Ralph Pape. It was playing essentially for the year of 1979 off-Broadway. It's a five-character play about a bunch of people about to turn 30 and about to go to a high school reunion in New Jersey. It's very funny and very touching. It was produced by a man named Wayne Adams. A young couple named Bill and Susan Termini came to New York from Chicago. They saw as many plays as you could see in a week in New York. One of the plays they saw was ours.

Bill and Suzy liked it a lot. They were on the board for producer Michael Cullen's Travel Light Theater [in Chicago]. They went back and told him that he had to come to New York to see it because it would be great for Chicago. And I remember it very vividly, because it was the night before our daughter was born.

My wife and I went met with Wayne Adams and with Michael Cullen. Michael said he would like the rights to do it in Chicago, and Wayne Adams said, "Well, you can have the rights, but Austin has to direct it." I sort of kicked Wayne under the table, I didn't want to . . . I mean, we're about to have a child. I don't want to go and direct a play that I've already directed and was very happy with. Just give him the rights, you know. But no, Wayne was insisting on it.

Michael Cullen said, "Well, OK, Austin can direct it," but he wanted me to use members of this new company in Chicago called the Steppenwolf.

The next night my wife went into labor and all the next day, of course, I was at the hospital with the baby. Wayne came over to see the baby at the hospital, and I said, "Look, after visiting hours tonight, can I come over to your house? Can we talk about this?" So I went over and Wayne cooked this steak and poured some wonderful red wine. I said, "Wayne, I can't do this. Just let him have whatever he wants in Chicago." He said, "No, you're going. I've kept this play open for a long time. It hasn't done you any harm, and I want to protect the property. I want it to be a success in Chicago because if it's a success in Chicago then it will begin to be done other places." So I finally said, "OK, I will teach them the New York production with the staging and everything and then I'll come back after the first preview."

I was really depressed. I really didn't want to do it. But I went out to audition the cast. I didn't know them at all, but I was struck by their talent. It was like, who *are* these people? I mean the company then was Joan Allen and Laurie Metcalf and John Malkovich and Gary Sinise and Jeff Perry and all these people. Glenne Headly and Terry Kinney, and Fran Guinan! For one role, I had to pick between Joan Allen and Laurie Metcalf.

So I came back. I thought, well, this won't be as unpleasant as I expected, but it's going to be quick. So I went back a couple of weeks later to begin rehearsal. We read through it one whole day and broke it down, beat by beat, and all that. It was nice. The following evening we had our first rehearsal up on our feet, and the chemistry that started to happen among this cast of five people was so incredible that I threw away the book and directed an entirely, *entirely* new production of it.

Wayne came out to see it. The rehearsal started, and he said, "Wait, you said you were going to reproduce the New York production, but this is completely different."

I said, "Just watch." By the end of the play, Wayne was ecstatic. It was as good in its own way as the New York production was. But a whole different production. Everything about it. It was a big hit. It had to be moved to another theater [Apollo Theater] where it ran for months and months and months. Glenne Headly won a Jeff Award and we got the ensemble award. It got two or three other nominations. So we all got along great.

Tim Evans: They saw that it wasn't so bad in the city, and other people's work wasn't so bad, after all

(although theirs was better) [*laughs.*] They decided it was OK to move. They thought the city was going to be where they should be. Some of the programming in the plays that they did didn't land well with the suburban audience. It was language issues or some nudity or whatever the case and they realized maybe we should be in a more urban situation.

We had done a show at the Jane Addams Hull House called *Exit the King*. It was a disaster because we did it in the huge snowstorm of '79 and nobody came. But they liked the space. And I liked the space, and it was sort of available, plus it had been [Bob] Sickinger's space. Not that anybody tied that together at the time. But it was 135 seats as opposed to 88. We could pay more people.

Terry Kinney: We were attached to our home base, but Highland Park was not a good place to be 23 to 25 years old. We craved the things that young people crave: to be able to go out to a restaurant or a bar, to be able to meet other people our age, and to be around other theater companies.

Laurie Metcalf: I would never have done it by myself, I would never have struck out on my own to be an actor. But I was surrounded with this family. We did it as a group. There were some of us who would've made it, who would've been successful individually, and others of us wouldn't have. I wouldn't have. I just know that I wouldn't have had the—I wouldn't have had a thick enough skin to go out and do it to try on my own. But within the security of the group, I was brave enough and I had opportunities to do parts that I never would've been cast in otherwise, you know, because we were all the same age, some of us had to play younger, some had to play older, so we always had those kind of built-in challenges, and it made us all better. I think we all just quickly got better the more plays that we did; we just did them back-to-back-to-back, you know?

[Being in Highland Park] gave us a long enough period of time where we were working in our little bubble and no one knew who we were, either as a group or individually, and no one bothered us and no one came to see us. We got better at our craft and stronger while we were working in our bubble there.

Terry Kinney: I always felt John would've been discovered, and maybe several other people. I know that there are those of us in the company that wouldn't have gone into acting without Steppenwolf, that wouldn't have been able to stay with it on any level. I'm one of them. I learned to do it by doing it with these people. That was what I responded to about acting. So, in a way, that's not about acting, that's about other people. "Repeatable relationships." That's a phrase Jeff used a lot. It referred to an actor understanding, embracing, and fitting into our very insular and downright tribal way of working. Not a lot of discussion, just engagement on a deep level, a trusting level, onstage. Plus, it was a person we liked to hang out with, like when you meet someone and sense something familial about them. It's unspoken, ineffable, and you just know it's something you want to repeat. That was our motto.

Laurie Metcalf: What's good is that when we did start getting some recognition, we already had some roots. We had had time to make those roots, you know? We were strong enough and rooted enough that Malkovich could go away and do a movie and come back, and it made us better.

I could have—I say this now, right?—but I could've been perfectly content to be in that moment of those years, where I was a secretary during the day who knew that, by six, I'd be in that little basement working on something new and trying to make all of my friends laugh or cry, you know? That was just about perfection for me. I couldn't have asked for anything more.

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