

## FACEBOOK TRIBUTES

### EDWARD ALBEE

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#### EDWARD ALBEE: PLAYWRIGHT AND MY PRODUCER – DIES!

In 1990, when I was the Artistic Director of Carnegie Mellon's Showcase of New Plays, I gave Albee our first Commitment to Playwriting Award. In my opening remarks (and Edward was there), I gave many reasons why he should be so honored –including my personal reasons: “. . .Edward Albee” I said “was one of the few successful playwrights that I know of who pumped back into the theater some obviously well deserved royalties (from “*Who's Afraid Of Virginia Wolf*”), specifically to promote the American playwright and new American plays – and in the old days, I was one of the recipients of his generosity.”

When producers Richard Barr, Clinton Wilder and Edward Albee began The Playwright's Unit in the 1960's, they invited me – along with about thirty others, including emerging playwrights John Guare, Lanford Wilson, Leroy Jones (Amiri Baraka) and others –to join the group. They rented the Van Dam Theatre in New York's Soho district, gave us a budget of ten dollars, exciting directors, first-rate actors and two week's to put up a show. I recall that while the late director Melvin Bernhardt was directing my play, “*Conerico Was Here To Stay*,” in the Van Dam lobby, a John Guare play was in rehearsal on the stage –and waiting to follow me was Leroy Jones' play, “*Dutchman*.”

Later, Barr/Wilder/Albee, took what they considered the best of the Unit's plays and produced them at Greenwich Village's legendary Cherry Lane Theatre. “*Conerico Was Here To Stay*” was one of the plays chosen. The following year, B/W/A produced my thriller, “*Night Of The Dunce*” –also at The Cherry Lane.

Edward — and everyone in the business called him Edward — was not a close friend, but he was always professional and cordial when we'd meet. The last time I saw Edward was at a New Dramatists luncheon about five or six years ago, where he addressed the emerging ND playwrights and exhorted them not to rewrite their plays just to satisfy the needs of the current development-to-death playwriting programs. Vintage Albee. After the luncheon, as he was walking out, alone, with no emerging playwrights following, I caught up with him and we chatted. Amiably. He did not seem frail, though some rumors about his health then were circulating.

That 1960's Playwrights Unit pre-corporate period of theatre is long gone, of course. And Edward's dying seems to put the final nail in the coffin of a *theatre that was*. Edward was an admirable artist to whom, it seemed to me, it was always about the work. And, while he was skilled and witty at playing the show biz games, I think he felt that they were essentially bullshit games.

My favorite play of his is a one-act chamber piece: "*Following The Sun*." In it, he has the seventy year old Herndon step out and riff on death. Here are a couple of lines:

"I get frightened sometimes. Don't you? About dying, I mean?  
. . .When you reach my age. . .well, you get a little frightened  
sometimes. Because you're alone. . .I go to my doctor once every  
year or so. I ask him; he says. 'You're getting old.' Well, I am. Still. I do  
get . . .just a little. . .frightened now and again. Being alive is. . . so  
splendid."

So it is, Edward. So it is. And I'll always be grateful that I had the opportunity to thank you in public for all that you did for me. And for other playwrights. And for your contribution to American Drama and theatre. RIP. (Photos: Early Edward, Late Edward)



**EDWARD ALBEE**