

I met Ted Mann forty years ago. Forty years ago – there’s a chilling phrase. I was a wide-eyed farm-boy with hay still in my hair arriving in the sophisticated big city or New York straight off the manure-soaked cornfields of Harvard University. I was one of a couple dozen would-be actors arriving to study at the famous Circle-in-the-Square Theatre in its new uptown location.

Running the whole operation were two adults. One of them scared me: a dark, intense man with a broken nose who looked like a gangster or a union thug. Fortunately the other man was a sweet, genial, balding, avuncular, possibly mentally deficient man we called Uncle Paul, who would walk down the halls offering us candy and piggy-back rides. I wonder whatever happened to him.

The scary gangster, once I got to know him, turned out – like one of his acting discoveries George C. Scott – to have the soul of a poet under his fearsome-seeming exterior. Ted loved theatre. Let’s face it: we all come into this business loving theatre, but we get over it. Ted never did.

At Circle-in-the-Square, I studied Shaw and Shakespeare, Chekhov and Ibsen, Moliere, Williams, Miller and O’Neill – and I have rarely touched them since. I came to Circle-in-the-Square because I wanted to study in NYC, I wanted to learn the business while I learned my craft. And I did. I learned that if I wanted to make a living on the stage I needed to do musicals and light comedy.

Ted must have missed that class. In an era when the APA-Phoenix was dying and Lincoln Center was floundering and Manhattan Theatre Club was a nascent blip in the Siberia of the Upper East Side and Roundabout hadn’t even made it into a grocery store basement, the Circle-in-the-Square was the bastion of Great Theatre in New York: great plays with great people.

While I was a student here, I saw Colleen Dewhurst in *More Stately Mansions*, Irene Papas in *Medea*, George C. Scott and Nicol Williamson in *Uncle Vanya*, James Earl Jones in *The Iceman Cometh* and many more. That is the Dream of Theatre: great plays with great people. For decades – decades – Ted Mann kept that dream alive in New York.

I have done some fifteen shows on Broadway. I describe myself as Broadway hack, and now that I am President of Actors’ Equity, I am myself a union thug. But within the heart of this Broadway hack and union thug lives the Dream of Theatre, and for that I thank you, Ted Mann.