

Androgyny," *Theatre Survey* 34 (November 1993), 43–53; H. Sheehy, *Eva Le Gallienne: A Biography*, New York, 1998; D. Wasserman, "Developing an American Acting Style," *New York Theatre Review*, II (February 1978), p. 6; P. Zeisler, "Toward Brave New Worlds," *American Theatre* 3 (November 1986), p. 5; *New York Times* (June 16, 1974) and (January 16, 1981). Many letters written over a five-year period by Le Gallienne to Mercedes de Acosta are located in the de Acosta Collection, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, PA.

Robert A. Schanke

Ludlam

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LUDLAM, Charles (1943–1987), playwright, actor, director, and designer, was a multidimensional, prolific artist responsible for founding and growing one of the nation's most unique theater enterprises, The Ridiculous Theatrical Company. He was born on April 12, 1943, in Floral Park, New York. Social, cultural, and familial conditions all conspired to shape the artist at the earliest age: his mother lost him at the Mineola Fair, where he aimlessly wandered into a Punch and Judy show, followed by a freak show, "where he saw armless black dwarves painting pictures with their toes" (Samuels, *Complete Plays*, x); the Catholic Church, with its high religious ritual and pageantry, was a prominent force in the Ludlam family; and a movie theater sat directly across the street from his family's home. Ludlam was encouraged to explore his vivid imagination as a child, producing backyard and basement plays and vignettes with other neighborhood children.

Known as a rebel and outcast throughout high school, Ludlam's first real exposure to theater came in the form of an apprenticeship at a summer stock company, the Red Barn Theater, in 1958. There he was exposed to the often frantic, haphazard, and chaotic experience theater can be. He pursued his newfound interest in the theater by traveling to New York and seeing a variety of theatrical entertainments, from the commercial to the avant-garde to the experimental. One such company of the latter type, The Living Theatre, proved to be such a significant influence and motivator for Ludlam that at the age of seventeen he founded his own avant-garde company, the Student's Repertory Theater in Northport, New York.

Ludlam enrolled at Hofstra University (1961–65), where as an acting major he met great resistance from the faculty. He was simply too outrageous and informed, and "his acting was excessive" (Samuels, *Complete Plays*, xi). Two significant milestones in his career grew out of this experience: first, as a result of being an unwanted actor, he turned to writing and directing and wrote his first full-length play, *Edna Brown*; and, second, he explored his sexual identity as a homosexual man. Shortly after

graduating from Hofstra, he left for New York City as a young gay playwright and actor wanting to explore and create new theatrical forms.

Collaborating with fellow absurdist John Vaccaro and Ronald Tavel (who had founded their own theater, Play-House of the Ridiculous), Ludlam performed his first stage role, Peeping Tom, in *The Life of Lady Godiva* in 1966. This production was “a self-conscious mix of high and low culture, an anarchic, psychosexual phantasmagoria filled with camp, drag, pageantry, grotesquerie and literary pretension” (xi) that defined Ludlam’s style of theater for the next twenty years. The significant influence of this production on Ludlam and his future as a playwright, director, actor, and designer cannot be overestimated. At this juncture, only one theatrical element was missing from Ludlam’s creative mix, and that was soon added when he performed his first drag role in *Screen Test* for the Play-House of the Ridiculous. Searching for good, innovative, *ridiculous* material, Vaccaro approached him; Ludlam, in turn, created his first *ridiculous* venture, *Big Hotel* (1966), a sweeping comic melodrama that cartooned the lives of the people who occupy a big hotel. During the production of his second play for the Play-House, *Conquest of the Universe* (1967), Ludlam and Vaccaro engaged in a conflict that ultimately drove Ludlam from the company and inspired him to start his own, The Ridiculous Theatrical Company.

Ludlam’s new company found its first home at Tambellini’s Gate (a movie theater) on the lower east side of Manhattan, but like so many fledgling theater companies, the troupe continually traveled from venue to venue seeking a permanent home. The company’s first theatrical venture, a double bill of *When Queens Collide* and *Big Hotel*, drew limited audiences (and consequently made insufficient money for a growing theater company). Ludlam supported himself (and often his company) by working in a health food store and doing occasional guest shots on a popular television show, *Candid Camera*. The company exhaustively continued to work, producing one Theater of the Ridiculous play after another, such as *Whores of Babylon* (1969), *Turds in Hell* (1969), and *The Grand Tarot* (1969), but it never received the critical or audience attention it so desperately needed to survive. All of that would change with the small, modest production of *Bluebeard* in 1970.

Based on H. G. Wells’s *Island of Dr. Moreau*, the plot revolved around a “mad vivisectionist in search of a third sex, obsessed with the creation of some ‘new and gentle genital’” (Samuels, *Complete Plays*, xiv). Produced in a gay bar in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village, *Bluebeard* caught the attention of critics, which in turn brought the audiences forward. Within days of its opening, The Ridiculous Theatrical Company had its first crit-

ical and financial success and began negotiations for a European tour, which would eventually be funded in part by the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Guggenheim playwrighting fellowship. *Bluebeard* established the standard for most of Ludlam's work thereafter, gaining awards, endowments, fellowships, critical acclaim, and an audience that grew from a predominantly homosexual base to a completely heterogeneous group.

Although plays such as *Eunuchs of the Forbidden City* (1971) and *Corn* (1972) broadened Ludlam's appeal to a larger audience, the unqualified success of *Camille* (based on Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camelias*) in 1973, resulted in five hundred performances over seven years. Ludlam's play incorporated all that he was renowned for: drag, high comedy, poignant melodrama, satire, detailed literary references, gender politics, clever manipulation of language and image, makeshift stage presentation, sexual frolic, and a plethora of acting styles. The success of *Camille* would sustain Ludlam's company for many years, allowing him to present other Ridiculous classics, such as *Hot Ice* (1974), *Stage Blood* (1975), and *Caprice* (1976), a play that satirized the fashion industry, presented a variety of unapologetic homosexual characters, and introduced Ludlam's longtime companion, Everett Quinton, to the New York theater crowd.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Ludlam and his company produced play after play, experience after experience, and secured a permanent home at One Sheridan Square in the heart of Manhattan's Greenwich Village. Ludlam was sought after by producers, lyricists, directors, theater companies, colleges, and universities for his innovative, experimental vision. He taught commedia dell'arte and playwriting at several colleges, wrote books for Broadway musicals, constructed puppet shows for children, conducted European and national tours of his company's work, and continued writing, creating such Ridiculous classics as *Der Ring Gott Farblonjet* (1977), *The Ventriloquist's Wife* (1978), *Utopia Incorporated* (1978), *The Enchanted Pig* (1979), *Reverse Psychology* (1980), *Galas* (1983), *How to Write a Play* (1984), *Medea* (1984), and *The Artificial Jungle* (1986), to name only a few. But nothing before or after would equal the success of his Ridiculous comic masterpiece, *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, which, according to Richard Connema, "has probably played in every regional theatre in this country and the UK since it was first presented by The Ridiculous Theatrical Company in 1984."

Ludlam died on May 28, 1987, from complications of AIDS at the age of forty-four.

See M. Banham, ed., *Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, Cambridge, 1988; K. A. Berney, ed., *Contemporary American Dramatists*, London, 1994; R. Brustein, *Theatre of*

Revolt, Boston, 1962; R. Connema, "The Mystery of Irma Vep, A Delirious Lampoon of a Gothic Thriller," *San Francisco*, www.talkinbroadway.com, accessed July 18, 2004; J. W. Dorff, *Gender and Performance: An Introduction to Female Impersonation in the West*, Providence, 1986; *Gay and Lesbian Literature*, Detroit, 1994; M. Hawkins-Dady, ed., *International Dictionary of Theatre*, vol. 2: *Playwrights*, Detroit, 1994; D. Kaufman, *Ridiculous: The Theatrical Life and Times of Charles Ludlam*, New York, 2002; P. J. Kaye, ed., *National Playwrights Directory*, Waterford, Conn., 1981; C. Ludlam, *The Complete Plays*, New York, 1989; B. Milman and A. Plard, *The Off Off Broadway Book*, New York, 1972; *Notable Names in the American Theatre*, edited by Walter Rigdon, Clifton, N.J., 1976; S. Samuels, "Charles Ludlam: A Brief Life," in Charles Ludlam, *The Complete Plays*, edited by S. Samuels and E. Quinton, New York, 1989, ix–xx; S. Samuels, ed., *Ridiculous Theater: Scourge of Human Folly, the Essays and Opinions of Charles Ludlam*, New York, 1992; S. Sherman, "Charles Ludlam," *Theater* 25 (1994); M. Smith, *The Best of Off Off Broadway*, New York, 1969; A. Wilcox, *Charles Ludlam on Commedia Dell' Arte, the Ridiculous, and Anything Else That Comes to Mind*, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, New York; *Writers Directory*, 11th ed., Detroit, 1994.

Gary Garrison

LUNT, Alfred David, Jr. (1892–1977), and **Lynn Fontanne** (Lillie Louise) (1887–1983), actors, were the most famous married acting couple in the American theater in the central decades of the twentieth century. Lynn Fontanne, born in Woodford, Essex, ten miles outside of London, began her theatrical career in England, and came to the United States in 1916 as a member of the company run by Laurette Taylor and Hartley Manners. She left the Taylor-Manners company and began her career in New York, achieving her first major success in the title role of Kaufman and Connelly's *Dulcy* in 1921. Alfred Lunt, born and raised in Milwaukee, studied at Carroll College in Wisconsin and Emerson College in Boston. While in Boston, he began performing professionally. After working for several years on tour, he achieved his first major success in the New York theater in 1919 in the title role of Booth Tarkington's *Clarence*. Lunt and Fontanne met that year and were married in 1922. They had their first success onstage as a couple in 1924 in Molnar's *The Guardsman*, and from 1928 through their final triumph in the 1958 production of Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* they appeared onstage exclusively as a team. Among their other successes were Anderson's *Elizabeth, the Queen* (1930), Coward's *Design For Living* (1933), Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1935), Sherwood's *Idiot's Delight* (1936), Giraudoux's *Amphitryon* 38 (1937), and Sherwood's *There Shall Be No Night* (1940).

Historical evidence about the Lunts' personal lives is largely circumstantial. Extremely protective of their privacy, they rarely discussed their