

## RED EYE OF LOVE

I finally had a success, of sorts, with Red Eye of Love. Sam Cohn and I, in association with Julia Miles, produced the show at The Living Theatre in 1961. Julia was then Sam's girlfriend, later his wife. She went on to found The Women's Project.

Sam had found Red Eye of Love at a reading in a bar-restaurant on Long Island in the 1950's. He took an option, and then, in his usual way, he did nothing about it. Julia eventually took matters into her own hands and produced the play at St. Anne's in Brooklyn. Sam asked me to go along with him to see it.

I went reluctantly. I had heard a reading of the play a few years before with Geraldine Page, and I did not find it particularly funny.

And so, one Friday night, towards the end of March, Sam and I rode the subway to Brooklyn to see Red Eye of Love. And I fell in love with the play.

Why this particular play? Why now?

As in most love affairs, it would be impossible to state why at the very first glance I lost my heart completely. Certainly, to the ordinary observer, there was nothing very prepossessing, about Red Eye of Love as it was presented in Brooklyn. The acting was bad. The direction was bad. The sets, costumes, and lighting – what there was of them – were also bad. But I didn't look at the play through the eyes of an ordinary observer. I looked at it as a lover, and it is a notorious fact that a lover can see beauty where others can see only ugliness. For me, Red Eye of Love was both sad and funny. For me, Red Eye of Love had everything.

The plot of Red Eye of Love was the classic situation of a poor, young man, a rich, older one, and a girl who, unable to choose between them, shuttles back and forth between the two. The rich man was a butcher named O.O. Martinas who owned the world's largest meat department store. The poor, young man was Wilmer Flange whose head was filled with schemes that he could never bring off

successfully. And the woman was Selma Chorgesse, someone who could be all things to all men. She was the personification of The American Dream. I saw my own life reflected in the play.

I was introduced to Arnold Weinstein, the author, the following evening. At this meeting, he was accompanied by his girlfriend, a young actress named Jane Romano.

“I loved your show,” I said.

“Let's face it,” said Arnold Weinstein. “Red Eye of Love is a great play.”

“Arnold is a great playwright,” said Jane Romano.

Arnold Weinstein and Jane Romano were both outsize. They were physically big to begin with, but in addition to this they were also emotionally extravagant, given to grand words and gestures.

“I wouldn't know about that.” I said. “All I know is that I thought your show was very funny.”

“Red Eye of Love is the whole history of America,” said Arnold.

“It's the history of the world,” said Jane.

Their enthusiasm was catching. By some mysterious process, it was decided that the show would cost \$7,500. We each agreed to put in one third of that amount. Sam Cohn used his own money. I called 25 friends, and persuaded them to give me \$100 each. And Arnold Weinstein raised his money by getting Wilhelm de Kooning, Franz Klein, and Phillip Guston, to each give a painting, which we then sold.

By this time I had photographed a number of productions at The Living Theatre, most notably The Connection, and in this way I had become friendly with Julian Beck and Judith Malina, the managers of the theatre. I knew that they were planning on taking their company on a tour of Europe that summer, and I asked if they would be willing to rent the theatre to us in their absence. They readily agreed, and I left it to Sam Cohn to work out the details.



Red Eye of Love  
Arnold Weinstein and John Wulp

At this time, there was a review running in Greenwich Village called Stewed Prunes. It starred MacIntyre Dixon, Lynda Segal, and Richard Libertini, and it was directed by a man whose name I can't remember and can't seem to locate. I decided that he would be the perfect person to direct Red Eye of Love, and I convinced Sam Cohn and Arnold Weinstein to go along with me in this idea. I knew that this director had once been an actor with The Living Theatre and I assumed that Julian Beck and Judith Malina would approve of him.

In this I couldn't have been more wrong. When I told Julian and Judith the director's name, they erupted in anger. There must have been some altercation between them, because they said that if I was determined to use this particular director, they would refuse to rent the theatre to us.

"What are we going to do?" said Sam.

"I have an idea," I said. "Why don't I direct?"

"You?" said Sam. "Have you ever directed anything before?"

"Only a couple of plays at Dartmouth," I said. "I just know all the things a director shouldn't do from watching what went on with my own show."

"You can't buy experience like that," said Sam.

During all this while, Arnold, Julia, and I were interviewing actors in our spare time. We had decided to use George Latchford, the young man who had played the part in Brooklyn, as Wilmer Flange. We got lucky in our casting of O.O. Martinas. Michael Vale showed up at auditions one day and he was perfect for the role, indeed so perfect that he continued to play it for the rest of his life. After Red Eye of Love, he made a fortune playing variations of O.O. Martinas such as Sam Breakstone, and Fred the Dunkin' Donuts man, in TV commercials. But Selma Chargesse, the female lead, presented a special problem.

“I know an actress who would be perfect for the part,” said Arnold.

“Who?”

“Jane Romano, of course.”

I had been afraid of this. “I don't know whether that's such a good idea,” I said. “Jane Romano may be the greatest actress in the world for all I know – I've never seen her act. But I don't think it's wise to let your personal affairs get mixed up with your work. I was in the middle of a situation like that on my own show, and I swore I'd never go through the same thing again.”

“Are you kidding?” said Arnold. “We'll be lucky if we can get Jane. You may not realize it, but she's got quite a following in New York. Jane is a star.” Arnold had some justification for this. At the age of thirty-three, Jane Romano, who had been understudying Ethel Merman as Mama Rose in Gypsy went on during a bout of sickness for the star, the only time in Ethel Merman's career that such a thing happened. Jane played the part for a whole week, and got excellent notices.

I tried to shift my ground. “Don't you think Jane is a little – big – for the role?” I asked.

“Jane's an actress,” replied Arnold indignantly.

“What does that have to do with her size?”

“She'll act small.”

But I was still unconvinced. “Do you suppose it would be possible for me to hear her read?” I asked.

“That's a little difficult.”

“Why?”

“I just got through telling you – Jane's a star.”

“Oh, come off it, Arnold. What has she ever done in New York besides Gypsy?”

Arnold drew himself up to his full height. “A star would be a star no matter whether anyone could see it shining or not,” he said.

“Well, I’d appreciate it if Jane would give me just a glimmer of her talent,” I said.

It was no wonder that when an audition was finally set up, I approached it with fear and trembling for I knew that the success or failure of the play might very well hinge on its outcome. But as soon as Jane began to say the lines of Arnold's script, I heaved a sigh of relief. Arnold was right. There was no other actress for the part.

Producing a play, whether on or Off-Broadway, is a little like juggling. A whole bunch of random elements is hurled into the air on the first day of rehearsal – the script, the actors, the setting, the costumes, the lighting, the music. These elements are kept in motion through the rehearsal period, and, in the case of an Off-Broadway show, through a series of paid previews. It is then the director's job to catch each of the brightly-colored balls that have been set spinning in time for opening night. A director needs all of a juggler's skill as well as a large portion of luck to bring off his task. When he succeeds, an audience accepts such a performance as a matter of course. When he fails, an audience watches all the various parts and pieces of a production being spilled upon the stage with the same sense of embarrassment it would feel if it watched an inept juggler drop one of his Indian Clubs.

The rehearsal period for Red Eye of Love was not without difficulties. Nearly everyone involved in the show had a temperament that could, at best, be described as erratic, and, knowing that I had never directed a show before, they all felt free to give me advice on how it should be done.

“I’ll show you how I see this particular scene,” said Sam Cohn. He jumped up from the seat where he was sitting and proceeded to demonstrate to the actors how he felt the scene on which they were working should be played.

“Now wait a minute,” said Arnold Weinstein jumping up and taking his place in front of the actors. He had some ideas of his own on how the scene should be played, and, because his ideas were sharply at variance with Sam's, an argument soon developed between them. The actors immediately

took sides and within a few minutes the rehearsal hall was a scene of wild pandemonium.

“Will you two please sit down,” I shouted to Sam and Arnold above the din. “After all, I’m supposed to be the director and I can’t even see what’s going on.”

But in spite of such incidents, the luck which had begun with the casting of Jane Romano seemed to hold. I had a clear vision of what I wanted, and so I used whatever anyone had to offer that contributed to that vision and rejected whatever did not. For this reason the most incredible decisions which probably would have resulted in severe damage to any other play only improved Red Eye of Love.

By the time the previews began, the show had not completely gelled. The audience reaction was favorable, but not overwhelmingly so.

Arnold Weinstein became frantic.

“Will you please tell the actors to speak faster,” he said to me. “I can’t stand to hear them stumbling over my beautiful lines.”

“It’s too horrible to listen to them,” said Jane Romano.

“American actors don’t know how to say the kind of lines I write,” said Arnold. “They don’t understand real poetry.”

“They’re horrible,” said Jane.

“The next play I have done is going to be in England,” said Arnold.

“They’ll understand Arnold’s work in England,” said Jane.

So I told the actors to speak faster.

This speeded up the play somewhat. The audience reaction improved, but it was still not altogether what it should be.

Two days before the final preview, Arnold came to me with another suggestion. “You know what I’ve been thinking?” he said.

“No, what?” I said.

“I think we should cut the first scene,” said Arnold.

“That seems rather drastic,” I replied.

“Something has to be done to speed up the play,” said Arnold. “It's taking too long for the audience to get into it.”

So I cut the first scene.

That night the audience was immediately caught up in the play and their interest kept growing right up until the final curtain. There were still a few rough edges to the performance, but I knew that I could have them smoothed out by the following night.

On the final preview, all the elements of the show miraculously fell into place. The audience reaction was wildly enthusiastic, and everyone predicted that Sam and I had a success on our hands.

After the performance, Jane Romano, Arnold Weinstein, Sam Cohn, Julia Miles, and I decided to go to Luchow's to get something to eat. I knew that I should feel elated, but for some unaccountable reason I felt depressed. I walked by myself slightly ahead of the others.

“Well, will you look at the producer of Off-Broadway's next big success, walking all by himself,” said Jane Romano.

“What's the matter, John, can't you stand to have a hit on your hands?” said Sam.

I didn't answer. During the four-week rehearsal period I had lost nearly thirty pounds, and now as I headed toward the elegant restaurant I was embarrassed to think how shabby I looked. The jacket I was wearing was unpressed and it sagged from my shoulders.

“Look what we've done to him, will you,” said Jane Romano as she gathered the fullness from my jacket in her hands. “Oh, honey, did we do that to you?”

The next afternoon I called the cast together for final notes before the opening night

performance. I thanked all the actors for their efforts. I wished them well. I said that I looked upon the production of any new play as a process of discovery in which all the people involved attempted to find the proper way of bringing the play to life. I said that regardless of the critics' opinions about their work, I felt they had successfully discovered the play that Arnold Weinstein had written.

Then Arnold Weinstein got up to speak.

He said he loved the actors. He said he loved what they had done with his play. He said that if everyone gave the sort of performance he had seen the night before, the show would be running for the next ten years.

During the afternoon, I returned to my apartment to take a short nap, and then later I dressed myself and walked back to the theatre. It was a hot, sticky June night, but I knew that the theatre was air-conditioned so I did not worry about this having an unfavorable effect upon the critics. As I strolled along Sixth Avenue, I contrasted my feelings of anxiety on the opening night of The Saintliness of Margery Kempe with my feelings of pleasant anticipation for Red Eye of Love. I was soon to discover, however, that in the theatre, there is very little that is certain. What I had hoped might prove a major triumph for me turned out instead to be a succession of minor disasters.

The play was divided into long scenes which generally took place on the full stage, and short scenes which took place before an act curtain. When this curtain was closed, the stage hands were able to shift scenery behind it without being seen by the audience.

The first scene of the play, a short interlude between two policemen, took place before the act curtain. It went off smoothly enough, but when it was over and the curtain was supposed to open, nothing happened. The curtain gave a short quiver, but it failed to budge.

My heart sank.

The curtain gave a second short quiver, but once again it failed to budge.

I put my hands to my head and watched wild-eyed with panic and fright.

The curtain gave a third short quiver, but still it failed to budge.

At this point the stagehand who was pulling the ropes must have lost his head. He obviously gave a mighty tug because the curtain suddenly jerked open, but in doing so, it wrenched the block to which the overhead pulley was fastened from the ceiling, and the next scene began with two ropes stretched across the front of the stage.

I ran out into the lobby of the theatre. "We're ruined!" I sobbed.

"Now, take it easy, John," said Sam. He had seen me bolt for the lobby and had immediately followed after me.

"We've got to stop the performance and fix the curtain," I said.

"Calm down," said Sam. "You know we can't do that."

"How are the stagehands going to shift the scenery if the act curtain isn't working?" I said.

"They'll work it out somehow," said Sam.

"Oh, God, why did you have to do this to me?" I said. I dramatically rolled my eyes heavenward.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. One of the actors simply removed the two ropes and whenever the act curtain was supposed to open and close, a stagehand walked it across the stage.

As soon as I saw that the performance was able to go on, I gradually regained my composure. Midway through the first act, I felt steady enough to take my place once again at the back of the house.



Red Eye of Love  
Michael Vale, Jane Romano, and George Latchford

I was just beginning to relax and enjoy myself when all of a sudden the audience was startled to hear a loud voice calling up the back stairs.

“What the Hell's going on here?” said the voice.

I immediately rushed to silence the intruder. As soon as I opened the doorway to the back stairs, I spotted the owner of the pet shop located below the theatre. A short, pudgy man, he was standing at the bottom of the steps and holding onto the railing as if he was about to charge. His face was covered with perspiration and the few wisps of hair that he had were matted to his forehead.

“Shh!” I said. “There's a performance going on.”

“I don't care if there is a performance going on,” said the owner of the pet shop. “You're flooding my store.”

“Not so loud,” I said. I ran down the stairs, grabbed the owner of the pet shop by the arm, and propelled him out into the street where his voice could not be heard.

“Now, what seems to be the trouble?” I said.

“I want to speak to the manager of the theatre,” said the owner of the pet shop.

“I'm the manager of the theatre,” I said. “What's the trouble?”

“Don't act so innocent,” said the owner of the pet shop. “If you're the manager of the theatre, you know what the trouble is. I don't like to get nasty about this, but enough is enough. I'm going to call the police.”

“Let's not get hasty,” I said. “If you 'd just tell me what's wrong, I'm sure we can straighten it out between ourselves.”

“If I've told you once I've told you a hundred times,” said the owner of the pet shop. “I could talk until I'm blue in the face and it wouldn't do no good with you. You're an undesirable tenant, that's what you are.”

“Believe me, I've never spoken to you before in my life,” I said.

The owner of the pet shop squinted at my face. "Who are you?" he said.

"I'm John Wulp."

"Are you the manager of the theatre upstairs?"

"Oh, I see what the difficulty is now," I said. "You must have spoken to Julian Beck."

"Yeah, that's the name, Julian Beck," said the owner of the pet shop. "You're just the person I want to see, Mr. Beck. I'm going to report you to the police."

"No! No!" I said. "You're making a terrible mistake. I'm not Julian Beck. I'm John Wulp. Mr. Beck left for Europe a couple of weeks ago. I'm renting the theatre in his absence."

The owner of the pet shop flew into a rage at this. "I'm not going to let you off that easily, Mr. Beck," he said.

He stalked into his store with me at his heels, headed straight for his desk, and picked up the telephone.

"What are you doing?" I said.

"I'm calling the police," said the owner of the pet shop.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," I said. "I don't know what sort of trouble you've had with Mr. Beck in the past, but I don't see any reason why we can't get along together. If you'd just tell me what's wrong I'll do whatever I can to have it fixed."

Light dawned. "You mean you're not Mr. Beck?" said the owner of the pet shop. He was still holding the telephone in his hand without having dialed a number.

"No, I'm John Wulp," I said, for what seemed to me like the hundredth time. "Mr. Beck is in Europe. I'm renting the theatre in his absence."

"Good riddance!" said the owner of the pet shop. "He was an undesirable tenant anyhow."

"Just because Mr. Beck was an undesirable tenant, that doesn't say I have to be an undesirable tenant too," I said. "If you'd just tell me what's wrong, perhaps I could have it corrected."

“Come with me,” said the owner of the pet shop. He led me to the rear of his store and dramatically opened the door to the cellar stairs. Water was dripping down the wall drenching the cartons of bird seed that were stacked against it.

“Look! Look at that!” said the owner of the pet shop. “You're flooding my store.”

“Oh, my God!” I said. “What do you suppose could be causing that?”

“I know what's causing it,” said the owner of the pet shop. “It's that God-damned air conditioner you've got in that theatre.”

“The air conditioner?”

“Do you have the air conditioner on now?”

“Yes, but –.”

“I might have known,” said the owner of the pet shop. “If I've told Mr. Beck once, I've told him a hundred times, that air conditioner leaks.”

“I'll have a man in to look at it tomorrow,” I said.

“Tomorrow is too late,” said the owner of the pet shop. “You've got to turn it off now.”

“I couldn't do that,” I said. “I've got a play opening tonight. All the critics are up there. It would be death to turn off the air conditioner in warm weather like this.”

“And in the meantime, what happens to my store?” said the owner of the pet shop. “You want to put me out of business? It's dangerous to have all that water running over the electrical wiring. This whole place could go up in smoke. And what about my birdseed? You're ruining my birdseed.”

“It would ruin my play to turn off the air conditioner now,” I said.

“I thought you weren't going to be an undesirable tenant,” said the owner of the pet shop.

“I promise you I'll have a man in to look at the air conditioner first thing in the morning,” I said.

“Only don't make me turn off the air conditioner now.”

“Will you put that in writing?” said the owner of the pet shop.

“I’ll do anything you want,” I said.

With that, the owner of the pet shop went back to his desk, found two pieces of paper, put a carbon between them, and handed them to me, along with a pencil. “Write down what I tell you,” he said, and thereupon proceeded to dictate an agreement which stated that I would be responsible for any further damages resulting from the failure of the air conditioner. When he finished, he told me to read back what he had dictated.

“It sounds good to me,” he said. “Sign it.”

I felt as though I was signing my life away, but nevertheless, I had no choice but to put my signature at the bottom of the paper. Then the owner of the pet shop gave me the carbon copy and took the original for himself. He neatly folded the document and put in in his safe.

“All right, now you can give me a hand,” he said.

Once again the owner of the pet shop led me to the rear of the store where the water was leaking. When we got there, he handed me a tin cup and told me to start bailing. So all the while the opening night performance of Red Eye of Love was going on overhead, I bailed water out of the basement while the owner of the pet shop tried to salvage as many cartons of bird seed as possible. Every time I looked up, I could see the canaries and parakeets on their perches, the tropical fish in their aquariums peering down at me with what I imagined to be lofty condescension.

The opening night performance of Red Eye of Love was over by the time I got out of the pet shop. As I was going up the front stairs, I met a friend of mine going down.

“How'd it go?” I asked.

“It was too funny,” he replied.

By the time I got to the lobby, the opening night party was in full swing. My face and hands were begrimed, my suit was soiled, and as I wandered among the guests trying to get some report on

how the show had gone, several of them stared at me with puzzled expressions on their faces as if they were trying to figure out who had invited me.

In the early stages of the party, an air of general hilarity prevailed. Michael Vale went around hugging and pinching the pretty girls, while another player, K.T. Townsend, a tall, buxom blonde, flirted with the men. At one point she came up and asked me if I wanted to dance even though there was no phonograph or radio playing, but I told her I was too tired. It was inevitable that Michael Vale and K.T. Townsend would eventually get together, and then, locked in each other's embrace, Michael's bald head against K.T.'s breasts, they swooped and glided around the lobby in rhythm to some music heard only by themselves.

But then, around 12:30, Sam went uptown to buy the morning newspapers. After this, the tension began to mount. No one laughed. No one danced. As the actors waited for the notices to arrive which would determine whether they would go on working for a time or go back to collecting unemployment insurance, they huddled together in small, silent groups. Half empty jugs of white wine and empty paper cups stood around the lobby. Uneaten potato chips grew soggy in the bowls.

I was the first one to spot Sam coming up the front stairway with the morning newspapers under his arm. "How are the notices?" I asked.

In reply, Sam simply shrugged his shoulders as he handed me the newspapers.

Because Sam had brought only one copy each of The Times, Tribune, and News, I was elected to read the notices out loud to the other people at the party.

Sam's reaction, coupled with my own experiences during the course of the evening, had prepared me for the worst, so I was amazed as I read to discover that all the reviews except The New York Times were raves, with Walter Kerr in The Herald-Tribune being especially glowing. It looked as though, in spite of everything, Red Eye of Love was the enormous success that everyone had predicted, and the entire cast let out a mighty cheer.

## NEW COMEDY SMASH!

"One of these days the avant-garde is going to wind up playing the Palace . . . With 'Red Eye of Love' I think they've just about made it. . . . Mr. Weinstein is a nay-sayer in good standing. But he is something more or at least something else. Director John Wulp has waxed and polished everything until you can almost see your reflection in it."

—Kerr, Tribune

"Author Arnold Weinstein is looking back a few thousand years from now at the United States today. Mr. Weinstein, who is aware of the comedy of life, has chosen to tell the history of the country in terms of an all-meat department store that grows from 13 to 50 floors . . . Mr. Weinstein is poignant and ludicrous, caustic and pithy."

—New York Times

"Defies description and tradition . . . offbeat slapstick . . . one surprise irrelevancy after the other . . . witty direction. The cast is excellent for this kind of inspired nonsense. Best of all, there are Jane Romano as the undecided Selma, George Latchford as the dreamer in search of a toy disease and Michael Vale as the meat man 'with a pot of gold beneath his cruel exterior.' Here is avant-garde with laughs!"

—Herridge, Post

"A topsy-turvy love story in which courtship, romantic dialogue and matrimony are gayly scorned. Merry but solid whacks are taken at platitudes to be observed in business success, drama, movies, traffic control and sex."

—Aston, World Telegram

"Zany humor gleams in 'Red Eye of Love.' Good news from the Living Theatre. They have installed some form of air-conditioning which works, and they have also installed a new comedy by Arnold Weinstein called 'Red Eye of Love.' It is dished up by an ingratiating young cast who will defy you to keep a straight face . . . dizzy and delightful. The Living Theatre has given us some odd and interesting offerings ('The Connection,' etc.) and 'Red Eye of Love' has maintained the old tradition."

—McClain, Journal American

"I'D TRY THIS ONE!"

—Kerr, Tribune

# RED EYE OF LOVE

a new play by Arnold Weinstein

THE LIVING THEATRE, 14th ST. and 6th Ave. • Air-Conditioned

Tues. • Fri. 8:30; Sat. 7 & 10:30; Sun. 2:30 & 8:30 • CH 3-4569

Little did we know what the future held for us. We hired a young publicist, Bob Ullman, to promote the show. He was the publicist on nearly every show I produced after that. We became life long friends.

But in spite of the good notices, in spite of all our efforts, Red Eye of Love never attracted a large audience. It ran about six months, and then closed.

Within two years, Jane Romano would be dead from Hodgkin's Disease.