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Preservation**

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April 30, 2008

Alicia Hurley
Vice-President for Government Affairs and Community Relations
70 Washington Square South, Room 1207
New York, NY 10012

**Re: NYU Proposal to Demolish Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments,
133-139 MacDougal Street**

Dear Alicia:

I write in response to your recently circulated letter and materials regarding NYU's current plans for demolition of the Provincetown Playhouse (referred to as "Rebuilding the Provincetown Playhouse" in your literature), and "Honoring a Cultural Institution" (again, to quote the NYU literature).

A few points must be made perfectly clear:

1. NYU's current plan is to raze the existing building to the ground, and replace it with an entirely new one.
2. NYU's current plan is to build a new theater in the new building which it would call the Provincetown Playhouse, although there would be no physical connection between it and the actual existing theater other than location
3. NYU's current plan is to take pieces of the current theater entrance façade, or a facsimile thereof, and apply them to the front entrance of the new building.

Beyond these factual points, I believe that the NYU literature, much like the presentations NYU has made about this plan, tells a story which is far from complete and entirely accurate.

Both the university and advocates for preserving the theater and its building agree that the façade of the Playhouse changed in 1940; however, the university seems to point to this as evidence that this building and this theater therefore have no historic significance, when this is far from the case. First, as the university is aware, virtually every Off-Broadway theater in New York has gone through a physical evolution similar to the Provincetown Playhouse's, with changes to the façade and often with multiple buildings being combined to create new ones. In spite of that fact, the Provincetown Playhouse façade and building have been virtually unaltered for the last almost 70 years since this one alteration following the theater's establishment.

139 MacDougal Street served as the first home of the Provincetown Players in 1916, while 133 MacDougal Street became their more permanent home soon thereafter in 1918. 133 through 139 MacDougal Street were combined and given a new façade in 1940 and became the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments. Though the façade changed, the underlying building and structure

at 133, which included the theater, remained in many ways the same. Thus the Provincetown Playhouse and Apartments of today at 133-139 MacDougal Street are widely recognized as maintaining a clear connection to the original Provincetown Playhouse and to the Provincetown Players, which included Eugene O'Neill, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Djuna Barnes, among others.

The post-1940 history of the building is almost as colorful and important. The Playhouse housed productions by Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, David Mamet, John Guare, and Charles Busch, until the university discontinued such productions there in the early 1990's. However, when the university renovated the theater in the 1990's, then-president Jay Olivia noted of the Provincetown Playhouse "it's a piece of our history...it was a shame to see a piece of our history falling down like that... We at New York University are deeply grateful for the privilege of restoring this wonderful cultural landmark for the benefit of our unique Village and spectacular City."

This would seem entirely at odds with the university's current perspective on and approach to the building and its great history. As you know, this building and this theater are widely known throughout the world and revered as the birthplace of Off-Broadway theater, and considered one of the most critical and defining locations in 20th century theater. In spite of the university's re-framing of the subject, I don't believe that this widely-held belief is mistaken, nor do I believe that there is much support for the argument that razing the existing building to create a new building is somehow "restoring" the pre-1940 conditions and establishing a "truer" connection to the original Provincetown Playhouse.

In the week since the NYU's plans to demolish the Provincetown Playhouse have been made public, the university has heard from literally hundreds of average citizens, writers and entertainers, historic preservationists, community leaders, and theater historians and academics from across the country and around the globe, who feel quite strongly that demolishing this building is not the way to "honor a cultural institution." Surely the extra 17,000 square feet of space the university will gain from the proposed new building – a literal drop in the bucket compared to the six million square feet of space the university says it intends to add over the next 23 years – could not be worth the acrimony and the loss of a beloved piece of our city and nation's history which the current plan entails. If NYU is in fact interested in honoring the history of this singularly important site of cultural significance, I urge you to rethink your current plan and instead preserve the existing building.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director