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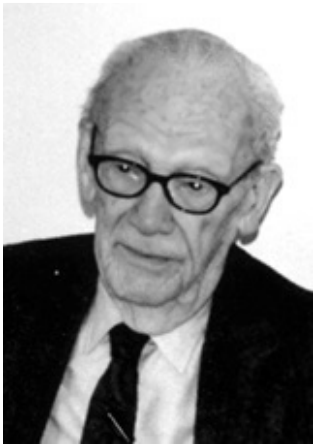
George C. Izenour

George C. Izenour, professor emeritus of theatre design and technology and director emeritus of the electro-mechanical laboratory of the Yale University School of Drama, where he served for 38 years, died March 24, 2007 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was 93.

Dr. Izenour was born July 24, 1912 in New Brighton, Pennsylvania. He recalled

> "I was born in a little town in the Beaver Valley of Pennsylvania about 30 miles west of Pittsburgh; New Brighton. My father was a small electrical contractor. We moved in the third year of World War I to Ambridge, a company town closer to Pittsburgh adjacent to the Conway railway yards in 1917. In 1918, the last year of the war my father moved us to Mansfield, Ohio. I was six years old at the time and I started my formal schooling there."



George C. Izenour

Photo/Rosemond Gréaux

Dr. Izenour's mother taught him English and Latin and his father history and mathematics before he started his formal education at 6. His interest in theatre and music started early. "I would have liked to have been an opera singer but I didn't have the talent," he once said. He appeared in all of the Mansfield Senior High School plays. He painted the scenery for them and became increasingly interested in the technical aspects of theatre.

Dr. Izenour excelled in high school and attended Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio. His mother, being an ardent Lutheran, sent him to Wittenberg hoping he would become a preacher. He acted in plays his first two years and became a student fencing coach. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt closed the banks during the Depression, Dr. Izenour's father lost his business, and Dr. Izenour took on responsibility for the rest of his education. He graduated from Wittenberg College in 1934 and pursued his master's degree in physics there. His thesis was the embodiment of what would later become the first electronic theatre lighting dimming system at Yale.

He married Hildegard Hilt after graduating from Wittenberg and moved to California where Dr. Izenour met Hallie Flanagan, the national director of the Federal Theater. He became the lighting director of the project and later designed the theatre at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco in 1939.

In San Francisco, he crossed paths with David H. Stevens of the Rockefeller Foundation who, after seeing Dr. Izenour's work, convinced him to apply for a grant. Dr. Izenour was made a Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation 10 days after the House Un-American Activities Committee declared all of the members of the Federal Theater Communists, effectively closing the Federal Theater. He landed at Yale, with his Rockefeller grant, where he developed the Electro-Mechanical Laboratory in an abandoned squash court at the Yale School of Drama Annex.

During World War II, Dr. Izenour worked on antisubmarine warfare and countermeasures for proximity fuses at a government lab in Long Island, New York.

After the war he returned to Yale where he built and installed several dimming systems out of the squash court. Ed Kook of Century Lighting became interested in the system. Dr. Izenour refused to sell the patents he had acquired and Century took a license to produce the Century-Izenour System. This business deal led to a lifelong friendship between the Izenours and the Kooks. The synchronous winch system followed the lighting system and so on through over 27 patents.

What was to be ostensibly his first theatre consulting job began with a phone call from McGeorge Bundy, then Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Harvard. Archibald MacLeish had written a program for a new theatre there which was to be a gift from the Loeb family. Mr. MacLeish wanted the theatre to convert from proscenium to thrust because these were, according to Mr. MacLeish, the two great forms of theatre which had to do with western culture.

Of course this idea of changing one theatre space back and forth between thrust and proscenium was deemed "impossible" by the experts, but Dr. Izenour made it work. It was published in all of the architectural magazines and launched George C. Izenour Associates as a theatre design and acoustical consulting firm. Today Izenour theatres exist across the United States, in Canada, Venezuela, and Israel.

Dr. Izenour retired from Yale as professor emeritus in the late 1960s and continued his consulting business in an old converted oyster shack next to his home overlooking the Thimble Islands at Stony Creek, Connecticut. The house was designed by his son, Steven Izenour, and won national recognition. Dr. Izenour and his wife lived there until her death in 2002. Until his death, Dr. Izenour was a resident at Cathedral Village in Philadelphia where he continued to work on theatre design projects.

Dr. Izenou was an internationally recognized authority in the fields of theatre design, engineering, and acoustics. He served with distinction as author, lecturer, inventor, designer, and engineering consultant. He wrote technical articles for many professional journals, wrote the section

on theatre design for the 1974 edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, and contributed to the McGraw Hill Dictionary of Architecture and Construction (1975).

Dr. Izenour is the author of three books. *Theater Design* (1977) and *Theater Technology* (1988) is a comprehensive, profusely-illustrated, two-volume study covering theatre design and technology from ancient times to the present. *Roofed Theaters of Classical Antiquity* (1992) is an illustrated study of the roofed theatres of ancient Greece and Rome.

Dr. Izenour held fellowships in the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Guggenheim Foundation. He was appointed a Benjamin Franklin Fellow of the Royal Society, and was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, Acoustical Society of America, and the National Council of Acoustical Consultants.

Dr. Izenour shared the Rogers and Hammerstein Prize (1960). He received the USITT Award from the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (1975), The George Freely Award from the Theatre Library Association (1977), and the Distinguished Service Award from the American Theatre Association (1978).

Dr. Izenour contributed many inventions to the technology of the theatre including; the basic inverse polarized rectifier electronic dimming circuit, the electronic multi-preset lighting control system, the synchronous winch system, articulated acoustical sub-structures, and related analogue and digital control systems.

Pennsylvania State University houses a collection of Dr. Izenour's original prototypes for lighting control and automated fixtures. There is also a collection of his linens and vellum drawings.

George C. Izenour Associates will continue his tradition of designing cost effective, acoustically and visually excellent multiple use performing arts facilities. His latest inspiration, the design of a 21st century dynamically engineered performing arts facility embodying all of the proven technologies he inspired over the years (and some new ones) into one facility, has yet to be realized.

This memoriam was submitted by members of George C. Izenour Associates

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