

December 17, 1937
The Dayton Daily News

Noted Designer Praises Inland Children's Chorus

Raymond Sovey, scene and costume designer, of New York, arrived in Dayton Friday to direct and stage the annual appearance of the Inland Children's chorus Tuesday night, with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra in Memorial hall.

Sovey, who spends his summers with the Municipal Opera in St. Louis, as technical director, and his winters in New York in the same capacity for producers, will stage the annual Christmas party for Inland Sunday afternoon at Memorial hall. Three performances are scheduled for this event.

Speaking in glowing terms of the Inland chorus Sovey said, "There is something so marvelous about this chorus, the interest of the children, the spirit with which they are being taught so much about music, and getting it in such a way that they don't feel they are being burdened. The chorus is directed by a young man who is a genius with children, Richard Westbrook, and the discipline he maintains is wonderful. Of course, with such interested backers as Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Whittaker, the children's chorus should be, and is, one of the grandest things of its kind.

"Busy as I am in New York, with several plays in the immediate future, I couldn't resist my opportunity to work with the concert appearance and the Christmas party," said the director.

Among the noteworthy achievements of Sovey is the new set which he designed and placed on the stage of Carnegie hall. The hall was done over in its original pink with gold stencils in the design, and the stage setting for the New York Philharmonic orchestra and the varied and many concerts given there had to be in keeping with the original decorations. Keeping in mind at all times the proper material which would reflect sound as it should.

Said Sovey, "The New York theater has been very slow this



RAYMOND SOVEY

season, but it is picking up tremendously. Jed Harris is interested in the success of "The Doll's House" (the Ibsen play done for Colorado this past year), and is doing "Our Town," a New England story. Ben Levy is doing "Turn About," from the Thorne Smith story, and should be fun.

Another one, called now 'Trio of Trombones,' by Kenyon Nicholson, will reach the stage, but will have the title changed."

Interested in every aspect of the theater, and the stages from which musical events are presented, Sovey said there were so many bad stages in the middle west. By bad stages he means acoustically, and to have to work with such handicaps would likely discourage many a technician, but to Mr. Sovey they provide a proper and picturesque setting for the appearances of the Inland Children's chorus.

Raymond Sovey, Broadway theatrical designer and two-time Tony Award nominee, was responsible for the staging, costuming, and lighting for the Inland Children's Chorus. He returned to Dayton often to refine his work and address audiences at several concerts.

The following pages include Sovey's biography and a profile written by theater professor Wayne Turney for whom Sovey was a mentor.

See December 1940 and 1945 articles about this key figure in the history of the Inland Children's Chorus.

Raymond Sovey

Costume, Scenic, and Lighting Designer

Raymond Sovey (1897–1966) was born in Torrington, Connecticut, and educated at Columbia University. He began his theatrical career as an actor but soon switched to set designing. Sovey's career as scene, costume and lighting designer spanned more than forty years on Broadway.

Gilbert and Sullivan hired him to design costumes and scenery for *The Mikado* at the Royale Theatre in 1927. Sovey's costume design for Tad Mosel's 1961 drama *All the Way Home* earned a Tony nomination. He costumed Fred Astaire in Cole Porter's *Gay Divorce* (1932) and he designed the sets for *The Petrified Forest* (1935), starring Humphrey Bogart and Leslie Howard, Rodgers and Hart's *Babes in Arms* (1937) and Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938).

Other career highlights include *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1941), *The Heiress* (1947), T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* (1951), *Gigi* (1951), starring Audrey Hepburn, Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution* (1954) and *The Great Sebastians* (Tony-nominated for Best Scenic Design, 1956).



And then, there was Ray Sovey. I learned more about design concepts sitting next to him than from any textbook ever written. He came on to design the last show of the first season ("The Jest"), and happily came back to design the entire next season. Then in his early seventies, Ray had designed more than 120 Broadway productions, including "Green Grow the Lilacs," "Gigi," "Tovarich," "The Great Sebastians," "The Chalk Garden," "Our Town," "St. Joan," "Strictly Dishonorable," "The Heiress," "Art and the Bottle" and many more. He was the true American Eclectic. And he taught me always to serve the piece.

And many other practical things. I used to sit beside him while he was working on some costume or other as he gave me a list of furniture he wanted me to get for the next show, and he'd make little sketches on my pad with whichever hand was free. And he'd say something like, "Now, if you can't find *this* which would be ideal, then look for such and so and we can paint it and cut off the whosis and it will mix. The *line* is the important thing and the size." And then he'd make a little perfect line sketch of the shape he wanted and I would go find it. And his sense of color! And character. And materials.

The picture on the right is of me as Will Spray in one of the shirts Ray made for everybody in the huge cast of Tom Jones. We were, after all in a 600 seat tent in central Ohio in August. Ray knew that heavy wool would have killed us all, but he needed something that would drape properly and hold up for the length of the run (which was two whole weeks since it was the last show of the season.) Ray, of course, found the perfect material for the shirts: shroud cloth! Exactly the right texture, but three times as light as any cotton then on the market, sturdy enough to hold up to the athletic goings on and the color of unbleached muslin.



There was always something seemingly effortless about Ray's designs that always evoked the play he was working on. Whereas, if you see a Mielziner design, you know instantly who designed it, when you see a Raymond Sovey design, you know instantly what show it is for. One of my life's ambitions is to get far enough ahead to research and write the definitive biography of Ray's work. In his day, he was known as "the dean of Broadway design." And now he is nearly forgotten. A travesty.

Professor Wayne Turney, DeSales University, describes above his relationship with Raymond Sovey. Professor Turney has taught Acting, Directing, Theatre History, Dramatic Literature, and Shakespeare. He has directed numerous professional and college productions from classics and Shakespeare to experimental contemporary plays.