

NBA COMMISSIONER

David Stern, Law '66, scores big at Columbia.

Page 9

SCREENING ROOM

Three alums take their degrees and head for the movies.

Page 8

FRED "THE CLAM"

Rain, wind, and frat boys are no match for this alum.

Page 7

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

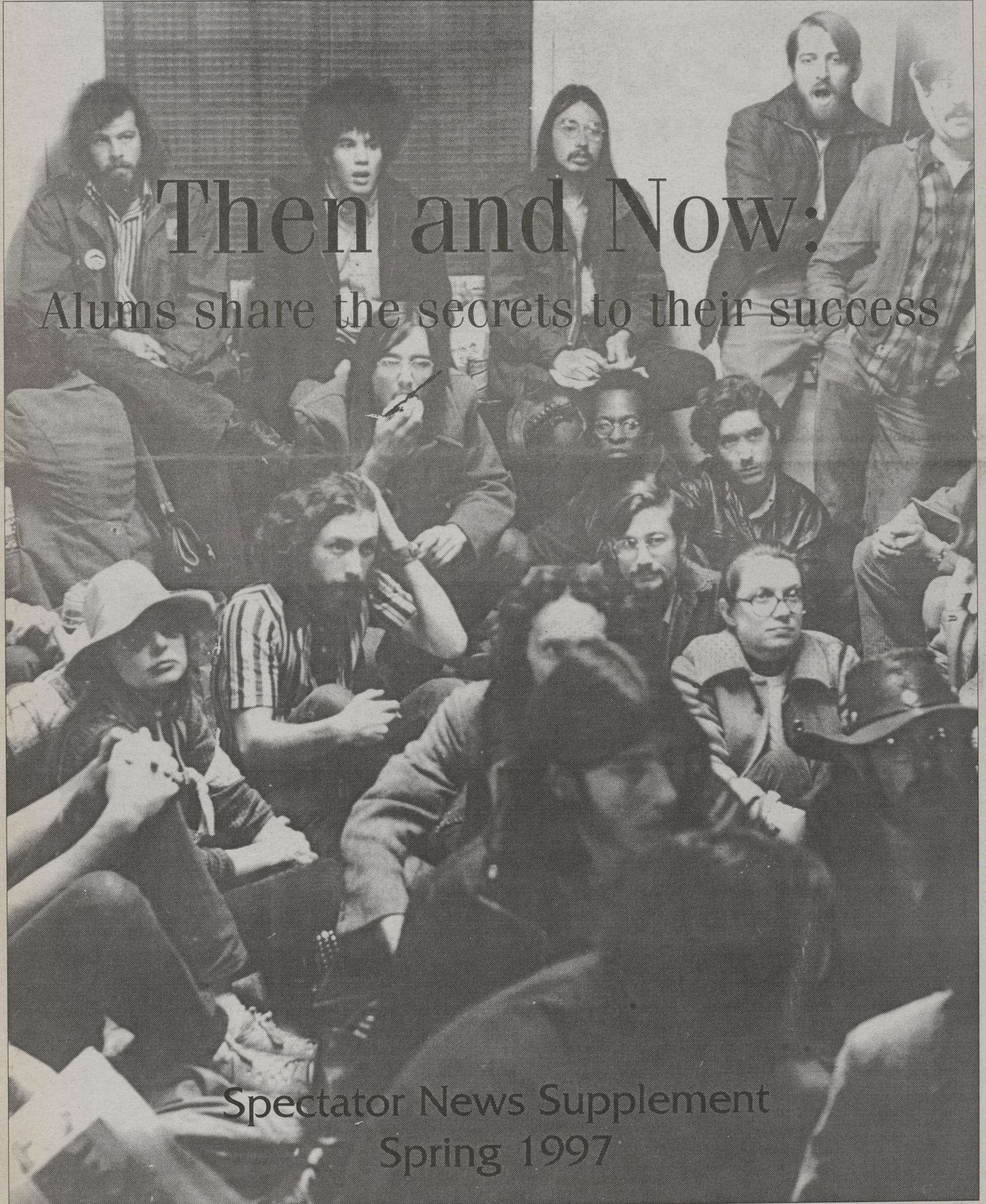
FOUNDED 1877

VOL. CXXI—NO. 64

Copyright © 1997
Spectator Publishing Company

NEW YORK, N.Y., WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 1997

FIFTEEN CENTS



Then and Now:

Alums share the secrets to their success

Spectator News Supplement
Spring 1997

Barnard alum makes a new name for herself on Broadway

Annette Niemtow, BC '66, put her English major to good work

By **SABRINA ROJAS WEISS**
Spectator Staff Writer

So many students in liberal arts colleges, particularly those majoring in art history or English, have resigned themselves to the fact that following their academic passions will probably not prepare them for careers in the real world. But Annette Niemtow, BC '66 and co-producer of the musical *Jane Eyre*, which opens on Broadway this October, said her education prepared her for a career in ways she never predicted.

It is hard to see how the woman who spent every Friday of her senior year gallery-hopping to give herself a cultural education would end up in anything less but a job that takes her to the theater five nights a week.

As a child of immigrant parents growing up in the Bronx, Niemtow believed that America was "a great meritocracy" to which Barnard would be her key.

"It wasn't as cynical as people would think of it now. We wouldn't think you go to college to get your degree. It was that you went to college and you would be transformed by your education," Niemtow said. "I learned to think more complexly ... I had a broader vision of the world, and [college] did all those things it was supposed to do."

Niemtow attended Barnard

during the rise of student activism and revolution in the 1960s, and said her generation was not really concerned about how much money they could make when they graduated.

Another factor in her outlook on college had to do with the faculty's philosophy at the time. Niemtow said many of her professors thought that teaching was naturally the best profession for their students to go into, and even most of the students assumed that was what they would do.

In a world that thought women should be teachers, this assumption made sense to her and her peers, Niemtow said.

"Suddenly money became more important than it was. It changed a lot."

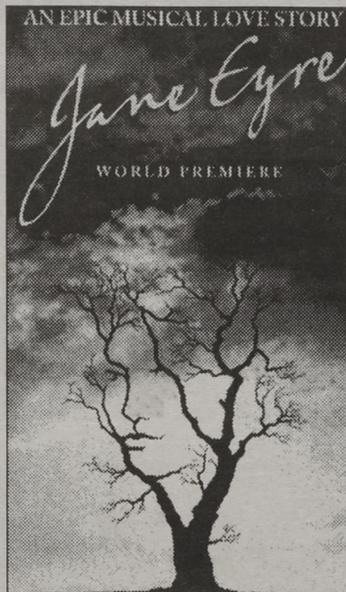
—Annette Niemtow, BC '66

Two of Barnard's English instructors at the time were Columbia graduate students

who became leaders of the feminist movement. One was Kate Millet, who wrote *Sexual Politics*, a book which set off the second wave of the women's movement. The other, Niemtow's adviser, was Katherine Stimpson, founder of the women's studies magazine *Signs*, and now the head of the MacArthur Foundation.

Although Barnard women had to wear skirts if they wanted to enter the Columbia campus, they were largely sheltered from the sexist discrimination occurring outside academia, Niemtow said.

"Our reading was a who's who



In October, *Jane Eyre*, the musical, will make its Broadway premiere, thanks in part to the efforts of Annette Niemtow, BC '66.

of what can girls do with our lives," Niemtow said.

After graduating, Niemtow went on to get her Ph.D. in English at Harvard, concentrating on American Literature, and became a professor.

The sexism at Harvard, which she said took the form of male-only libraries and faculty, shocked and frustrated Niemtow.

Nevertheless, she survived well enough to carry out a successful teaching career at Harvard, City University of New York, and Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

Niemtow remained content in her teaching position until the late 1970s, while she was teaching at Bryn Mawr, when inflation rates soared.

"Suddenly money became more important than it was. It changed a lot," she said.

After deciding to leave academia, she interviewed for a wide variety of jobs, including one selling coal mines. To a student of the



COURTESY ANNETTE NIEMTOW

'60s who always imagined mines as a source of pollution and a place where workers were oppressed and abused, the idea of making millions of dollars selling them was a little too much for Niemtow.

Instead, she began a tennis teaching company in 1984 and ran it for eight years.

By 1992, Niemtow was once again in search of a meaningful occupation when she attended a panel conversation at which Barney

Rosen-sweig, the producer of Cagney and Lacey and The Trials of Rosey O'Neil, defined what it meant to him to be a producer.

Rosen-sweig defined producing as the opportunity to bring together creative forces to hold a conversation with the public and raise important issues.

Niemtow walked out of the panel knowing exactly what she wanted to do. Now Niemtow produces plays with scripts that can entertain an audience and teach them at the same time.

"The first play I produced was the *Kentucky Cycle*, which was about coal mines, and it was probably not the accident I think it was," Niemtow said, remembering the career she turned down.

The play, which ran in 1993-94, won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and three Tony nominations including Best Play.

Her current project, *Jane Eyre*, is co-produced with David Mirvish, Pam Koskow, and another Barnard alumna Janet Robinson. John Caird, the writer of the musical version of *Les Miserables*, wrote the script, and Paul Gordon, the writer of the *Fantasticks*, wrote the music.

Niemtow said one of the greatest pleasures she received when the play opened in Canada was introducing the text to an audience who probably had never read the book. She expects sales of the book will

jump once the play hits Broadway, an accomplishment she said would be as valuable as all the monetary profits the play could make.

"That's what it means to be a producer. You try to figure out what it is people should see, think about seeing, might want to see," she said. "I don't think it's a coincidence that a Barnard alum who was an English major is producing a musical of *Jane Eyre*."

Even though a large part of her job involves hiring personnel, getting backers, and arranging the other financial matters of the plays, Niemtow

"I don't think it's a coincidence that a Barnard alum who was an English major is producing a musical of Jane Eyre."

—Annette Niemtow, BC '66

uses her background as an English major when she reads scripts and suggests modifications to the authors.

"If we were sitting around talking about *Jane Eyre* we might talk about how the book is a Bildungsroman ... and then we might switch and say, but wait a minute, it's really a great love story about the tangled relationships of the Victorian world ... and about women's condition," she said.

Sometime in the future, Niemtow hopes to produce for television and movies, but she is still reluctant to go into these mediums, which are harder to back out and have a more volatile cast and crew than theatrical productions.

"What happens though is that a project I do I know will eventually lead me to do a movie," Niemtow said.

One of Niemtow's next projects will be a musical based on a children's story called *Mirette on the Highwire*, a story about a nine year-old tight-rope walker at the turn of the century, touching on the issues of sexism, tradition, and fear. She hopes *Mirette* will give her the opportunity to use a female director, a rare breed on Broadway.

"You will see the Barnard girl come out again," she said.



COURTESY ANNETTE NIEMTOW

With her faithful companion Ollie, Annette Niemtow, BC '66, rests from her hectic lifestyle as the producer of a Broadway musical that will open in October.

This is the final Spectator for the semester. Stop, don't cry. Put the tissues away. We'll be back in time for commencement and we'll appear every Wednesday this summer.