

JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

Begin the Beguine



Photo Marc Gigot

Production Humain trop humain – CDN Montpellier
Recreation of a production by Burgtheater (Vienna) & Needcompany, March 2014.
With the support of the Flemish authorities.

Begin the Beguine was the last play the legendary filmmaker John Cassavetes wrote – for Peter Falk and Ben Gazzara – before his death. This bleak and glimmering allegory named after the Cole Porter-evergreen about love and death, Eros and Thanatos, never got further than the preparatory stage. It was never performed.

The present production of **Begin the Beguine** is the result of an exceptional cooperative project by Faces Distribution Corporation and Needcompany. The German publisher S. Fischer Verlag asked Jan Lauwers to take on the task of staging this masterpiece for the first time since it was written more than 25 years ago. The first version was produced in collaboration with the Burgtheater in Vienna in 2014. hTh – CDN Montpellier invited Jan Lauwers to make a second version with Spanish actors from hTh. Gonzalo Cunill and Juan Navarro will be entering into confrontation with Needcompany members Romy Louise Lauwers and Inge Van Bruystegem.

An apartment at the end of a street by the sea. With a seaview, despite the covered windows. They have just settled in, possibly forever, or just for the weekend: Gito Spaiano and Morris Wine. With their last breath of life, both men are stuck in some way or another. Stuck in their friendship as well as in life. They want to enjoy themselves to the fullest for the final cut. As such, they order women - prostitutes - in the dim light of their bedroom. They wait and philosophise. Gito wants sex, Morris pines for emotion and elusive love. However: "If the dark is nothing but the absence of light, love is at least a crack of the door."

John Cassavetes is one of the most interesting artists I know. His humane approach to art has always had a profound influence on me. In the 'images' he created he was not only deeply human, but also entirely individual. Cassavetes has been one of the rare, genuine mentors in my life. – Jan Lauwers



Photo Marc Gigot

Text

John Cassavetes

Directed by

Jan Lauwers

With

Gonzalo Cunill, Juan Navarro, Romy Louise Lauwers and Inge Van Bruystegem

French translation

Dominique Hollier

Spanish translation

Antonio Fernandez Lera

Dutch translation

Sarah van Camp

Production

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With the support of the Flemish authorities.

+/- 2h

Performance in Dutch, Spanish, French and English, subtitled



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Interview with Jan Lauwers

Jan, can you tell us about your introduction to this last play by John Cassavetes? How did you get hold of it and which elements made you decide to put it on the stage?

John Cassavetes is one of the most interesting artists I know. His human approach to art was always a powerful influence on me and will continue to be so. In his images he is not only human but also very autonomous. Cassavetes is one of the few real mentors in my life. When Faces Distribution Corporation gave me the opportunity to stage the world premiere of this final play, I was very moved. Numerous stage directors have reworked Cassavetes' films for the theatre. But that does not matter. Cassavetes was never able to direct 'Begin the Beguine'. It feels as if I was given the mission of paying tribute to this great master in this way.

Gonzalo Cunill is an old acquaintance in your oeuvre and for this production you also have your own daughter, Romy Louise Lauwers, play a part. Even though 'Begin the Beguine' is not a production by the usual Needcompany group, you still revert to working relationships that invest highly in shared intimacy. Is it important to people this real "huis clos" by Cassavetes?

My theatre work always emanates from cooperation with the actors. I had already created several productions with Gonzalo Cunill. The Gonzalo and Juan Navarro duo requires a completely different approach! Add Inge Van Bruystegem and Romy, two radical actresses and as director I am blessed; it's a godsend. At such moments I always work very intuitively. With these people, all four formidable performers, I do not fear failure. I am curious to know what this obscure play really means; sometimes it's dead boring and full of amoral pretence, at other times poignantly profound and so beautiful as to move you to tears.

Both Cassavetes and I are authors who have been writing for the same people for a long time. This allows us to go deeper, to take up more radical positions, etc. It is really a shame that the concept of the ensemble has fallen into oblivion.

Isn't the picture the play presents too much of a caricature: men and women dealing with each other in an extremely machismo setting?

It's certainly remarkable how differently we view this sort of play from three years ago, before #metoo erupted. It's probably an outdated metaphor: the whore and the unhappy man looking for consolation. But the play goes much further than that. It is significant to stage this play now because in the end the woman's view wins out over the man's false tenderness. What I have learnt from #metoo is above all that a woman's pitying look is essential to the emancipation of the man. The sometimes grotesque reactions from men in the media are the final convulsions of a time now past. It is quite staggering how women are institutionally oppressed always and everywhere. Or is it perhaps the case that an oppressed woman is still more interesting than an alpha male licking his own balls and feeling he has a right to his solitary struggle while howling at the moon?

For many years your work has been based on the growth and musicality of the various languages simultaneously enacted on stage. What are you looking for in this clash of languages? Their plasticity? Various ways of referring to reality? Or also a way to attenuate reality, shrouding it in order to draw out its weak spots?

Language! What aimless meandering about language and multiculturalism! What a waste of time! The failure of language in the theatre, and yet so beautiful. Just like the pleasure of asking for directions in foreign places using grand gestures, only to end up being lost anyway! We will perform 'Begin the Beguine' in a Flemish theatre, in Spanish, in French and in English. A play written in American by a genial Greek who did not shy away from anything; played by a Spaniard, an Argentine and two fantastic women originating from a divided country. What a joy!

John Cassavetes

John Cassavetes, the son of a Greek businessman, soon discontinued his studies to enrol at the Academy of Dramatic Arts. In the early 1950s he worked as a television actor and in 1957 he established a finishing studio for actors in New York. He recorded an improvisation exercise in 16 mm which he financed by appealing for a loan in a television broadcast. In 1955 John Cassavetes' career as a film actor started with 'The Night Holds Terror' by Andrew L. Stone. He appeared in one film after the other ('Crime in the streets', 1956, by Don Siegel; 'Edge of the city, 1957, by Martin Ritt; 'Saddle in the Wind', 1958, by Robert Parrish) before he went to the other side of the camera. In 1960 he directed 'Shadows'. The subject of love between a white man and a young black woman was presented from the perspective of the black community. The film, featuring two unknown actors, stood out because of the ample space taken up by improvisations. The shooting, outside in a real environment, bears the stamp of a new cinematographic language: long takes devoid of narrative ellipses to the rhythm of the spoken word. The editing did not escape this rule of a work in continuous evolution either. An important detail: the music perfectly underlined the movement of the camera. This first film became the spearhead of the new American film trend. On the release of 'Too late blues' (1961), about the demise of an idealistic jazz player, it was criticised by Paramount, the film's producer. 'A child is waiting' (1963), Judy Garland's last appearance on screen, evoked the same reticence. In 1967 John Cassavetes played a part in 'The Dirty dozen' by Robert Aldrich and in 1968 in 'Rosemary's baby' by Roman Polanski. Subsequently he returned to art cinema, away from Hollywood. 'Faces' (1968), performed without financing, was one of his masterpieces. This portrait of the failure of a marital relationship took six months of filming and two and a half years of editing. The intensity of the actor's performance was the result of fully spontaneous expression. The camera pursued and interpreted every facial expression as possible intentions exposing hidden desires. Because of the recognition a fruitful period started for Cassavetes. He filmed 'Husbands' (1970) with Peter Falk and Ben Gazzara about three married men going adrift; 'Minnie and Moskowitz' (1971), 'A Woman Under the Influence' (1973) in which Gena Rowlands played the part of a mother getting torn between various roles. 'Gloria' (1980), a detective film made in New York was his greatest public success. Gena Rowlands featured as a failed actress pursued by the mafia. 'The killing of a Chinese Bookie (1976)', in the same vein, puts Ben Gazzara on the scene as the owner of a striptease club in a Los Angeles pestered by murderers. After 'Opening Night' (1978), a Pirandellian reflection on the theatre or on life, Cassavetes received acclamation for 'Love Streams' (1983). This adaptation of a theatre play took stock of the Cassavetes-Rowlands couple. The filmmaker developed his traditional themes: death, madness, loneliness. After 'Big trouble' (1985) Cassavetes, who was already ill, started on 'Begin the Beguine' with Peter Falk and Ben Gazzara. He died unexpectedly in 1989. As a theatre author and director he realised five plays with his son, Peter Falk or Gena Rowlands as actors in Los Angeles from 1980 to 1987. In 1984 the film 'Love Streams' was awarded the Golden Bear at the Internationale Filmfestspiele (Berlin) and in 1980 'Gloria' was awarded the Golden Lion at the Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica (Venice).

Gonzalo Cunill

He studied at the National School of Dramatic Arts in Buenos Aires and attended a course with Raul Serrano and Agustín Alezzo and later with Cristina Rota and Fernando Piernas in Madrid. He was introduced to the work of Jan Lauwers and Jan Fabre during workshops and to the work of Manuel Barroso during an audio-visual seminar. In the creations of the directors Carlota Subiros, Joan Ollé, Rosa Novell, Javier Yagüe, Gerardo Vera, Luis Homar, Julio Wallovits, Lurdes Barba and Juan Navarro he played Brecht, Racine, Pirandello, Valle Inclán, Dostoyevsky, Thomas Bernhard, Martin Crimp, Wallace Shawn, etc. With Jan Lauwers' Needcompany he played in 'Caligula' and 'Morning Song' (two plays for which he was awarded the Special Critics' Prize in Barcelona) and in 'Snakesong trilogy'. Since 1993 he has been acting in Rodrigo García plays, in particular in 'Agamemnon', 'Goya', 'Golgotha picnic', 'Daisy' and '4'. In 2016 he acted in T.C. Boyle's 'America', directed by Stefan Pucher, Münchner Kammerspiele (Germany), and in Pasolini's 'Who is me', directed by Alex Rigola, Temporada Alta Girona (Spain). He frequently appears in television series and films, including 'Catalunya über alles!' by Ramon Termens, 'Amor idiota' by Ventura Pons, 'La carta esférica' van Imanol Uribe, 'La silla' by Julio Wallovits and 'The Perfume, history of a murderer' by Tom Twicker. He is also featured on the bill in 'L'altre frontera' by André Cruz Shiraiwa (2013). He also made 'Altamira' by Hugh Hudson (2016).

Juan Navarro

Parallel to his Political Science studies, he enrolled for three years at the theatre laboratory William Layton in Madrid and he took part in a creation seminar at the Theater Institute of Barcelona. He was introduced to dance theatre during a seminar at the Pina Bausch company and to the circus at Circus Space in London. After having shared artistic adventures with for example La fura del Baus, General Eléctrica of Roger Bernat and the companies of Maria Galán, Ferrán Madico and Anita Saij, he joined La Carniceria teatro of Rodrigo García in 2000. Since that time he played in 'A veces me siento tan cansado que hago estas cosas', 'The History of Ronald, the clown of McDonald's', 'Agamemnon', '2186', 'Muerte y reencarnación en un cowboy', 'Golgotha picnic' and '4'. In 2016 he acted in Ana Borralho's and João Galante's 'To Walk the Infernal Fields', directed by Markus Öhrn. He directed productions in Spain, Germany, Venezuela and about 15 films for cinema and television. He also teaches and heads various training courses in Europe. Since 2014 he has been part of the core members of hTh CDN Montpellier, headed by Rodrigo García.

Romy Louise Lauwers

Romy Louise Lauwers studied dance at secondary arts school in Brussels. She has already worked with Inne Goris on *Naar Medea* (2008), with Peter Seynaeve on *mondays* (2010) and *betty & morris* (2011) and with Abattoir Fermé on *Apocalypso* (2012). She has also acted in Patrick Toye's feature film *Little Black Spiders* (2012). She is a founding member of the art collective Kuiperskaai.

Marketplace 76 (2012) is her first production with Jan Lauwers. She takes also part in his installation *The House of Our Fathers*. She replaces Yumiko Funaya in Grace Ellen Barkey's *MUSH-ROOM*. In fall 2014 she'll be taking part in *Just for Bozen | Bolzano* in Transart14 and *All Tomorrow's Parties*, for the opening of *Steirischer Herbst* (Graz). Romy Louise Lauwers is currently on tour with *Hamlet* by Kuiperskaai and with *War and Turpentine* by Needcompany.

Inge Van Bruystegem

Inge Van Bruystegem studied dance at the London Contemporary Dance School (1996-99), followed by various workshops in Antwerp, Vienna, Luxemburg, London and elsewhere. She worked as a photographic model for several years, but in the meantime participated in several projects: performances including *wolv goes international* (2002) with Veronika Zott in Vienna, *drindrunkmehr* (2003) for the Tanzquartier Wien, *Pasavoir* (L'Aeronef/Victoria, 2001), *Aarschot-Mechelen* (Gand Cru, 2004) and a guest performance in *Project 1* (Poni, 2004). She has also appeared in short films by Hans Bryssinck, Hans Van Nuffel and Ingrid Vanderhoeven, among others.

Jan Lauwers' *The Lobster Shop* (2006) is her first play and her first venture with Needcompany. She replaced in addition temporarily Louise Peterhoff in Grace Ellen Barkey's play *Chunking* (2005) and *Eléonore Valère* in *The art of entertainment* (2011) by Jan Lauwers. She is a member of the cast of Jan Lauwers' play *The Deer House* (2008), *The House of Our Fathers* and *Begin the Beguine* (2014).

Tour dates

1, 9, 10, 29 March 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
1,3,24 April 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
3, 13 May 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
6, 12, 16 June 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
14, 19 September 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
13, 21 October 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
4, 19 November 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
10, 19 December 2014	Burgtheater, Vienna
18 February 2015	Burgtheater, Vienna
9 April 2015	Burgtheater, Vienna
24, 26, 27, 28, 31 January 2017	Humain trop humain - CDN Montpellier
1, 2, 3 February 2017	Humain trop humain - CDN Montpellier
16 May 2017	Le Cratère, Alès Cedex
23, 24, 25 January 2018	Teatre Lliure, Barcelona
29, 30 January 2019	Kaaitheater, Brussels
1, 2 February 2019	Toneelhuis, Antwerp

'Begin the Beguine' is just as absurd as a Beckett play, just as exclusive as an evening among gentlemen and just as philosophical as a Chekhov comedy. The ideal director for this rough mixture would have been Cassavetes himself, if he would not have died 25 years ago. The only director with the indispensable combination of empathy and distance is perhaps the Belgian Jan Lauwers.

Wolfgang Kralicek, Süddeutsche Zeitung, March 2014, fragment.

WORK FOR THEATRE

JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

1987 Need to Know

Opening: 24 March, Mickery, Amsterdam

1989 ça va

Opening: 18 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt

1990 Julius Caesar

Opening: 31 May, Rotterdamse Schouwburg

1991 Invictos

Opening: 18 May, Centro Andaluz de Teatro, Seville

1992 Antonius und Kleopatra

Opening: 14 February, Teater am Turm, Frankfurt

1992 SCHADE/schade

Opening: 21 October, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt

1993 Orfeo, opera by Walter Hus

Opening: 23 May, Bourlaschouwburg, Antwerp

1994 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur

Opening: 24 March, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt

1995 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Pouvoir (Leda)

Opening: 11 May, Dance 95, Munich

1996 Needcompany's Macbeth

Opening: 26 March, Lunatheater, Brussels

1996 The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Désir

Opening: 6 November, Kanonhallen, Copenhagen

1997 Caligula, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part one

Opening: 5 September, Documenta X, Kassel

1998 The Snakesong Trilogy, reworked version with live music

Opening: 16 April, Lunatheater, Brussels

1999 Morning Song, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part two

Opening: 13 January, Lunatheater, Brussels

2000 Needcompany's King Lear

Opening: 11 January, Lunatheater, Brussels

2000 DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DjamesDjoyceDeaD

Opening: 12 May, Das TAT, Frankfurt

2001 Ein Sturm

Opening: 22 March, Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg

2001 Kind

Opening: 21 June, Het Net, Bruges

2002 Images of Affection

Opening: 28 February, Stadsschouwburg, Bruges

- 2003 No Comment**
Opening: 24 April, Kaaithheater, Brussels
- 2004 Isabella's room**
Opening: 9 July, Cloître des Carmes, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 All is Vanity**
Opening: 8 July, Théâtre Municipal, Festival d'Avignon
- 2006 The Lobster Shop**
Opening: 10 July, Cloître des Célestins, Festival d'Avignon
- 2008 The Deer House**
Opening: 28 July, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2008 Sad Face | Happy Face, A Trilogy, Three Stories on Human Nature**
Opening: 1 August, Perner-Insel, Hallein, Salzburger Festspiele
- 2011 The art of entertainment**
Opening: 5 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Caligula**
Opening: 17 May, Kasino, (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2012 Marketplace 76**
Opening: 7 September, Ruhrtriennale, Jahrhunderthalle, Bochum
- 2014 Begin the Beguine**
Opening: 1 March, Akademietheater (Burgtheater), Vienna
- 2015 The blind poet**
Opening: 12 May, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels
- 2017 Begin the Beguine**
Opening: 26 January, hTh, CDN - Montpellier
- 2017 War & Turpentine**
Opening: 7 December, Toneelhuis, Antwerp

PUBLICATIONS IN BOOK FORM BY AND ABOUT JAN LAUWERS

- LAUWERS, Jan, *Leda*, Bebuquin (Antwerp), a coproduction with IT&FB publishing company, Amsterdam, 1995.
- VANDEN ABEELE, Maarten, *The Lucidity of the Obscene*, Needcompany in cooperation with IT&FB publishing company, Brussels/Amsterdam, 1998.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La Chambre d'Isabella* followed by *Le Bazar du Homard*, Actes Sud-papiers, Paris, 2006.
- STALPAERT, Christel, BOUSSET, Sigrid, LE ROY, Frederik, (eds.), *No Beauty for Me There where Human Life is Rare. On Jan Lauwers' theatre work with Needcompany*, Academia Press, IT&FB publishing company, Ghent/ Amsterdam, 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Restlessness*, Mercatorfonds, BOZAR Books, Needcompany, Brussels, 2007.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Sad Face | Happy Face, Drei Geschichten über das Wesen des Menschen*, Fischer Taschenbuche Verlag (Frankfurt), 2008.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *La maison des cerfs*, Actes Sud-papiers, Paris, 2009.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *KEBANG!*, Uitgeverij Van Halewyck, 2009.
- FREEMAN, John, *The Greatest Shows on Earth. World Theatre from Peter Brook to the Sydney Olympics*, Libri Publishing, Oxfordshire, 2011.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Sad Face | Happy Face, Una trilogía sobre la humanidad*, Papeles Teatrales, Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, 2014.
- LAUWERS, Jan, *Silent Stories*, McaM, Shanghai, 2016.
- BRAECKMAN, Dirk, LAUWERS, Jan, *The House of Our Fathers*, MER Paper Kunsthalle, Ghent, 2017.

PRIZES

- Mobil Pegasus Preis, Internationales Sommertheater Festival Hamburg, for the best international production, *ça va*, 1989.
- Thersitesprijs, Flemish theatre critic prize, 1998.
- Obie Award in New York for the play *Morning Song*, 1999.
- *Kinematrix Prize* for Digital Format, International Film Festival Venice 2002, *Goldfish Game*, 2002.
- Grand Jury Honor for Best Ensemble Cast, Slamdance Film Festival, *Goldfish Game*, 2004.
- Le Masque, prize awarded by the Académie Québécoise du Théâtre in Montréal, Canada, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Prize awarded by the Syndicat Professionnel de la Critique de Théâtre, de Musique et de Danse in France, for the best foreign production, *La Chambre d'Isabella*, 2005.
- Culture prize awarded by the Flemish Community 2006, theatre literature category, for the *De kamer van Isabella* and *Ulrike* scripts.
- Grand Prix – Golden Laurel Wreath Award for Best Performance for *Isabella's room*, MESS International Theatre Festival, Sarajevo, (2009).
- Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic Austria, 2012.
- Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award at the Venice Biennale, 2014.
- Golden Laurel Wreath for Lifetime Achievement Award, MESS International Theatre Festival, Sarajevo, 2014.
- Premio Mayor, Premio Teatro del Mundo, category 'Translations', for the translation by Micaela van Muylem of the *Sad Face | Happy Face* trilogy, University of Buenos Aires, 2014.
- Barcelona Critics Prize 2015 - International Dance Performance was awarded to *The blind poet*, 2016.
- Golden Mask Award by the newspaper Oslobodjenje for *The blind poet*, MESS International Theatre Festival, Sarajevo, 2017.

NEEDCOMPANY is an artists' company set up by the artists Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey in 1986. Maarten Seghers has been a member of Needcompany since 2001. Lauwers, Barkey and Seghers form the core of the company, and it embraces all their artistic work: theatre, dance, performance, visual art, writing, etc. Their creations are shown at the most prominent venues at home and abroad.

Since the very beginning, Needcompany has presented itself as an international, multilingual, innovative and multidisciplinary company. This diversity is reflected best in the ensemble itself, in which on average 7 different nationalities are represented. Over the years Needcompany has put increasing emphasis on this ensemble and several artistic alliances have flourished: Lemm&Barkey (Grace Ellen Barkey and Lot Lemm) and OHNO COOPERATION (Maarten Seghers and Jan Lauwers).

Needcompany revolves around the individual artist. Everything is founded on the artistic project, on authenticity, necessity and meaning. The medium itself is continually questioned, and there is constant examination of the quality of the content to be conveyed in relation to the form it takes. Needcompany believes in quality, cooperation and innovation. Needcompany is a leading voice in the social debate on the urgency and beauty of art at both a domestic and an international level.

JAN LAUWERS (Antwerp, 1957) is an artist who works in just about every medium. Over the last thirty years he has become best known for his pioneering work for the stage with Needcompany, which was founded in Brussels in 1986. In the course of this period he has also built up a substantial body of art work which has been shown at BOZAR (Brussels) and McaM (Shanghai) among other places. From 2009 until 2014 Needcompany was artist-in-residence at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Jan Lauwers was awarded the 'Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria' in 2012. In 2014, he was rewarded with the 'Golden Lion Lifetime Achievement Award' at the Venice Biennale. He is the first Belgian to receive this prize in the theatre category. In 2018, the Salzburg Festival presents 'L'incoronazione di Poppea', the first opera staging by Jan Lauwers.

Jan Lauwers studied painting at the Academy of Art in Ghent. At the end of 1979 he gathered round him a number of people to form the Epigonensemble. In 1981 this group was transformed into the Epigontheater zlv collective which took the theatre world by surprise with its six stage productions. In this way Jan Lauwers took his place in the movement for radical change in Flanders in the early 80s, and also made his international breakthrough. Epigontheater zlv presented direct, concrete, highly visual theatre that used music and language as structuring elements.

Jan Lauwers needs company. He founded Needcompany together with Grace Ellen Barkey. Together they are responsible for Needcompany's larger-scale productions. The group of performers Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey have put together over the years is quite unique in its versatility.

Since Needcompany was founded in 1986, both its work and its performers have been markedly international. And since then, every production has been performed in several languages. Its first productions were still highly visual, but in subsequent productions the storyline and the main theme gained in importance, although the fragmentary composition remained. Lauwers' training as an artist is decisive in his handling of the theatre medium and leads to a highly individual and in many ways pioneering theatrical idiom that examines the theatre and its meaning. One of its most important characteristics is transparent, 'thinking' acting and the paradox between 'acting' and 'performing'.

NEEDCOMPANY

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