

“ON A DOUBLE-DOG DARE: MARGO JONES’ PRODUCTION OF *INHERIT THE WIND*”

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1954 Margo Jones’ longtime friend Tad Adoue sent her letter saying that he had “discovered” a courtroom drama that, despite having been rejected by eight Broadway producers, might just be right up Margo’s alley. “I double-dog dare you to produce this!” he wrote, “It will take GUTS to do this in the bible belt.” But “guts” was one thing that the lady whom Tennessee Williams called, the “Texas Tornado,” had plenty of. Playwrights Lawrence and Lee had written a play based upon the famous 1927 Scopes Monkey Trial, but since they believed that by the 1950s, the debate over evolution vs creationism was long settled, they felt sure that audiences would recognize *Inherit the Wind* as an allegorical protest against McCarthyism. A play rejected by New York producers as too controversial seemed an unlikely script to have its world premiere in Dallas, but Jones immediately saw the power and potential of the script. This paper will explore how Margo drew upon her own religious upbringing in a small Southern town, her experience with Houston’s short-lived Federal Theater unit, and her history of presenting socially conscious works to conservative Dallas audiences in order to stage what the influential Dallas theater critic John Rosenfield called “a new play of power, humanity and universal truth.” The production broke all attendance and box office records and soon caught the attention of the very Broadway producers who had originally rejected the script. As had happened in the past, Margo was excluded from the Broadway production of a play that she had had the vision and courage to produce when no one else would. In this case she even ended up in court fighting the producer for the right to keep end with a brief discussion of the 2017 production of *Inherit the Wind* at Theater Jones, a Dallas theater company founded in 2009, inspired by its namesake, Margo Jones.