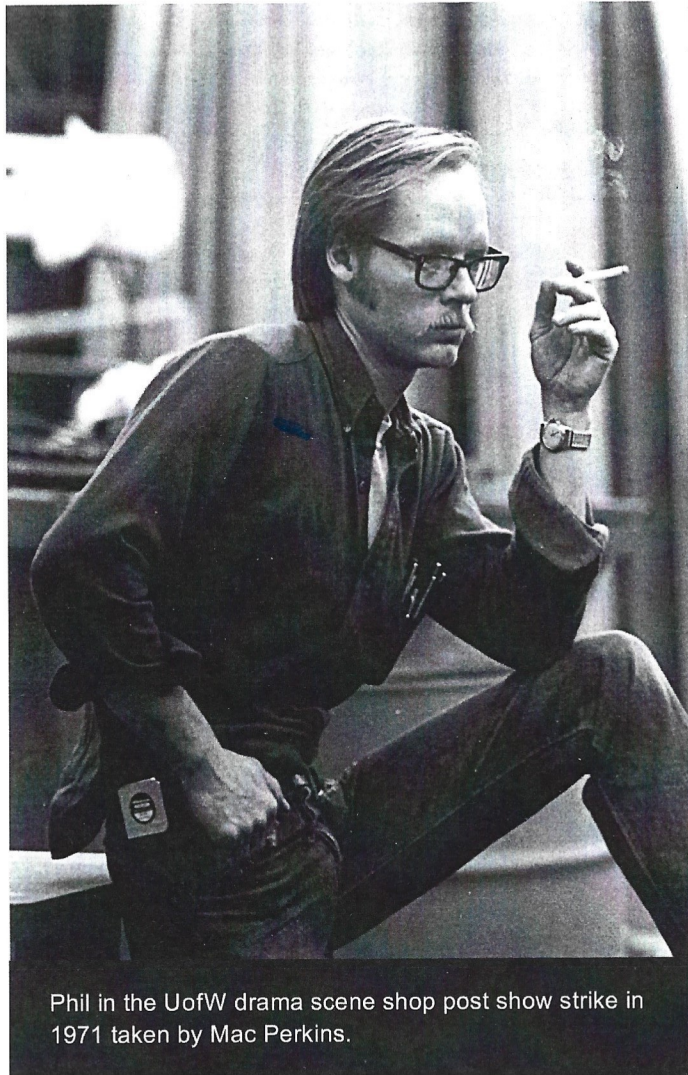


## Pacific Northwest Theatre Associates

**On the personal front, 1975 was an interesting year.** Back in the mid-1960's Phil Schermer received his MA in design and technical direction at the University of Washington School of Drama. Tyke Lounsbury, the technical direction professor there, then offered, and Phil accepted, the staff position of drama scene shop supervisor. As supervisor he was in charge of maintaining all three theatres and the scene shop, tech budgeting, ordering supplies, and scheduling and supervising the student crews building and running the shows, including the operas staged by the music department. He also taught an occasional lighting class and designed scenery and lights for shows as there were more shows being done than student designers to do them. (As an undergrad lucky me got to do some, too, for that reason.) Tyke's long-range plan was that Phil would take over his faculty position when he retired in the near future.



Phil in the UofW drama scene shop post show strike in 1971 taken by Mac Perkins.

**A few years later, on the way into work at the U one morning, Phil needed some ailing piece of his audio equipment repaired.** He decided to drop it off at a small shop in Lake City where a Malcolm Donald Perkins, Jr. did repairs. This led to Mac's hanging out at the scene shop and his eventual four-year stint on staff to maintain equipment and do sound.

**Greg stepped down as head of the drama department** and his replacement did not get on well with Phil. There was a 'clash of the Titans', so to speak. In the fall of 1974 he 'fired' Phil by eliminating his staff position and changing it to a faculty position. Three times, eventually, to get it to fit in the University guidelines as the rules for removing 'unclassified staff' were not simple. Once the confusion was cleared up, Phil, of course, was not hired for this 'new' position or to replace the then-retiring Tyke as technical director. Because Phil had accumulated hundreds of hours of uncompensated overtime over the years for which, due to the heavy schedule, he was not able to take the compensatory time off, he decided to claim pay for the uncompensated work. Lawyers got involved. Phil's lawyer didn't think he had a chance in hell and was shocked when they settled.

**Meanwhile, Greg took advantage of the situation** and immediately offered Phil the position of technical director at ACT. Phil accepted and began his new job at the end of the 1975 season. So Phil was unemployed for only about two months and built a storage shed for our yard stuff for fun. He was never unemployed again.

**Luther Losey was the owner of Display and Stage Lighting,** It was where one went to rent or buy theatrical lighting and effects equipment in Seattle. Luther was wanting to retire and would occasionally offer to sell to customers he felt may be interested.

**It was always annoying to us that a lot of theatrical materials and hardware were not available in Seattle.** One had to order such from California or the east coast, usually without much lead time, and we were at the mercy of shipping time to our little corner of the country. It was the dark ages with no internet then to do searches, either.

**So there was a confluence of events and facts.** Phil had settlement money; Luther Losey wanted to retire; Mac was freelancing, having quit in solidarity when Phil 'left' the U; we theatre folk wanted to be able to buy theatre stuff here in Seattle... Phil approached Greg and proposed he join in a partnership with him and Mac to buy out Luther and turn that business into a theatre supply company. Greg agreed.

**They all decided that it would be better for Greg to negotiate** the purchase with the very senior Luther rather than the 35-year-old whippersnapper, Phil. When the deal was done we all bandied about for a name. Northwest Theatre Associates was taken, so Pacific Northwest Theatre Associates, Inc. was born. After all was said and done and we took over the business it took only a few days of answering the phone with the full name before the acronym PNTA was adopted and, eventually, in the theatre community it evolved into 'Pinta'.



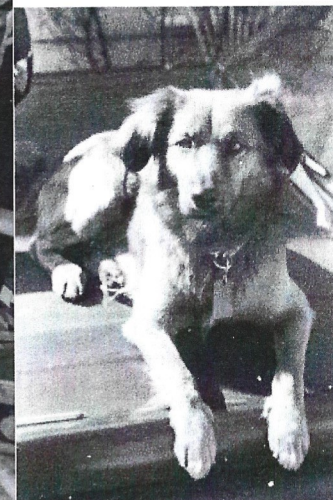


**Cathy Breen, University of Washington Drama grad**, former ACT lighting designer and manager at the 5th Avenue Record Shop, became the first employee. Donna Grout, also a UofW grad and former ACT tech and lighting designer, was hired when business took off.

At left in a photo of unknown origin is Display and Stage Lighting (originally called Scenic and Lighting Studio, Inc.), 2410 1<sup>st</sup> Ave, PNTA's original home. It was in terrible condition and the place seemed to have never been cleaned. Inventorying what exactly we were buying was a sneeze-fest. When the final papers were signed we kept our fingers crossed that the homeless folks frequenting the upstairs would not be accidentally set alight and wipe us out. There was no hot water. The sucker leaked so badly that a maze of plastic sheeting, hosing and buckets was jerry-rigged under the ceiling in the attempt to keep our new business from being washed out... Mac set up a repair shop in the cold, damp space behind the office/store, seen below, from which he managed to keep the Seattle theatres' equipment running. Phil set about bringing in theatre hardware, fabric and paint.



Below is Oscar, Mac's dog and constant companion, the first in a long line of PNTA employee pooches



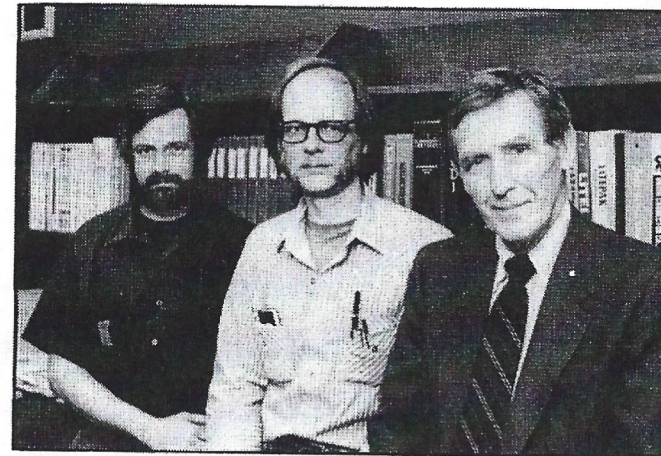
“ PNTA's first home: The building was pretty shabby inside and out, it couldn't qualify for insurance due to inadequate heat/ plumbing. There were no offices to speak of except for the Sales and Business desks out front. I was the second employee (sales, inventory control, rental). Cathy, the first employee, handled billing, purchasing and sales/rental I think. Two large warehouse rooms behind the front office: one held gel cabinets made of hard movie posters from the 30's and 40's, a bunch of torpedo like covers about 3 feet tall, lots of stuff and boxes, the second room was cleaner and had good wood shelving for new instrument stock. Somewhere there were 2 or 3 crystal showers & mirror balls, fog machines and bubble machines for rent. Our main competition was Olsen's, a catalogue theatre supply company. Mac was always in the back fixing and sorting and setting up shop, Phil came and went dealing with ordering, banks & company policy, Greg stopped by now and then to meet with the other owners. Luther would stop by to see how things were getting along (he always seemed to be shouting) and would feed parking meters about to expire, on his way in and out. Luther's friends (I only remember the drunk ones) would come in looking for him but he wasn't usually there except for a visit now and then – Cathy dealt with them gently/expertly. Restaurants [nearby] were the Rendezvous or Mama's Mexican Kitchen. After a year or so I left to travel and when I came back in 1979 the store had moved to Westlake and was quite respectable looking with much more stock and many more systems in place and a functional building that was set up for business.

Donna Grout



**The business was a success**, and in late 1976 PNTA rented, remodeled and moved the store into 316 Westlake in the new year. Phil designed the spaces and we did the remodel ourselves. We were all crap sheetrock tapers. I got to pick the paint we used, my first interior design job. It was luxurious compared to the old place as it had a sound roof, and heat! There were real counters, a great repair shop space for Mac, a shipping area and loading dock, offices and bathrooms and there was even a kitchen area. It had a huge basement for storing PNTA's now large stock with both a hydraulic elevator (Seattle's last) which made a funny flushing sound when lowered and stairway access. It turned out that this building was not without its own challenge, though, as the basement occasionally flooded when the storm water overwhelmed the ancient culverts and sewage backed up into it. In response, lower shelf heights were raised and wading boots were at the ready...

**As the business grew rapidly and so did the staff.** Robin Adkins (former ACT Box office and subscription manager) came on board and created our first catalog in 1978 to which we all contributed time and effort. I did illustrations of various items (my drawing of the painting sponge lived on for years) to supplement manufacturer's pictures and even some copy-writing. It was a huge project and proved to be key to PNTA becoming a successful regional business with a staff of eleven by the time of the second catalog being published in 1981. By the third publishing in 1985 there were seventeen employees crammed into the 316 store.



**OWNERS:** Each with a lifetime of work in professional theatre, Mac Perkins, Philip Schermer and Gregory Falls provide the core and scope of PNTA's services.

(left) The 316 staff 1978:

(rear) Mac Perkins *technical services*, Ruth Brinton *accounting*, Phil Schermer (*management*, Robin Atkins *sales*)  
(front) Donna Grout *purchasing*, John Shaw *rental*, Mary Schuster *shipping*

(center) The cover of our first catalog in 1978.

(right) The PNTA owners from the 1985 catalog.

All photos by Mac Perkins except where noted.

**PNTA just kept growing and eventually Phil took over the management job 'in his spare time' and he did a business course at Seattle Central.** (Meanwhile, Greg kept kicking him upstairs at ACT.) Product lines were added and in 1980 competitor Gibson Sound and Light was purchased, adding considerably to the lighting rental stock and the first sound inventory. As a result, the basement space next door was rented to accommodate this expansion, and special event lighting services were eventually added.

**By 1982 it was obvious the business needed a larger space and it was agreed that it was time to buy a building and not pay rent to someone else anymore.** A new partnership was drawn up to buy a building this time and rent to themselves. Perkins, Falls & Schermer bought the building across the street on the corner of Harrison & Westlake from Athletic Supply. As it was still under lease to the Sunbeam Company so it wasn't until October of 1984 that PNTA was able to take over the building and remodel it to satisfy its needs. Phil did design duty and I did colors again, and the big move across the street to 333 Westlake commenced in 1985. The building, originally a car dealership, though lacking a basement storage 'flood zone' and elevator, had a huge, sturdy second floor with a ramp and conveyor belt that made moving materials and equipment up and down relatively easy.





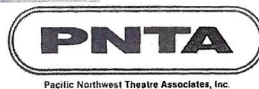
(above) The PNTA staff in front of the 316 Westlake store in 1981 including several ACT alum in italics:

(rear) *Donna Grout*, Greg Benjamin, Chris Beardsley, Gene Burke, Tom Bocek, Ruth Brinton, Neil Bestwick, *Phil Schermer*, *Robin Atkins*, *Mac Perkins*  
 (front) John Shaw, *Oscar Perkins*, *Mary Schuster*, *Doug Overstreet*, Diane Sutton, *Greg Falls*

The move across the street was accomplished quickly by the then staff of 17 and the late Oscar's successor, George. Of course, not only did the new building provide PNTA room to increase product lines and lighting services for events, this also provided the opportunity for further expansion. Theatre Drapery Supply was purchased and so a theatre drapery and backdrop manufacturing shop added in the new store in 1986.

The fourth catalog was published in 1988 announced the popular addition of the "Dog Therapy Department" with the inclusion of a lovely portrait of George Perkins and Patty Mathieu's Lance. By 1991, with the addition of Jack Perkins, seen at center, they took over the then annual publication and insisted on the designation of Dogalog. It proved to be a wise decision.

By 1993 it was determined that PNTA should provide fabrication services. Over time the carpentry, welding and scenic artist services were merged with the event services to become the Production Services Department. By the next year this move required additional space to meet the demand for these services and was fulfilled by adding a shop in a building on Boren. PNTA now had a full time staff of 27, George, Lance and Jack, plus the 'overhire crew'.



(center) George, Lance & Jack

(below) The 333 Westlake building in 1985.



By 1996, PNTA's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, 'the store' was an established institution in the region. It was where you could have designed, rent or buy the materials and equipment for professional, amateur or school stages and productions. It could provide equipment, crew and design and fabricate for special events, conventions, and museum displays. Pacific Northwest Theatre Associates had become something that none of us had expected when we decided to solve our local theatrical equipment and material sourcing problem.

It was also the year that the Schermers and Falls sold the business to Perkins/Brinton due to Phil and Greg's illnesses. It was a sad end to such a successful partnership, but, not the end of the business. Mac eventually moved the store to Georgetown and then decided to sell PNTA in 2008 and kept the design and fabrication part of the business, in 1997 it was renamed Pacific Studios, and Mac is still running it as of this publishing.

