

# Weekend

The New York Times

FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 1986

## New Realm of Theater Inside a Bridge's Vaults

By JENNIFER DUNNING

**T**HE Brooklyn Bridge has long inspired dreams and fantasies. But for sheer exotic color and ambition, few of those dreams could match "The Memory Theater of Giulio Camillo," which opens tonight for 18 performances in the bridge's Brooklyn anchorage.

The play with music, a fantasy written and directed by Matthew Maguire, takes place in sets constructed by nine artists and architects in the anchorage's seven vaults, turning the anchorage into a model of the memory of a 16th-century philosopher. The installations, which in themselves create a mysterious, comical and even frightening dream landscape, will be open to the public Wednesday through Sunday afternoons in a free exhibition that runs through July 13.

The bridge's anchorages or huge anchoring supports have been the stuff of other fantastic projects, from an actual wine vault to plans for Federal Treasury gold vaults and even a multi-level indoor shopping mall envisioned by John A. Roebling and his son, Washington, who designed and oversaw the building of the bridge. The anchorage on the Brooklyn side was used as a children's playground and industrial storage space until 1963, when it was renovated for the celebration of the bridge's centennial.

Creative Time, a nonprofit arts organization founded in 1973 to assist visual and performing artists in the realization of work designed for public presentation in New York, was invited by the Brooklyn Borough President's Office to use the renovated anchorage as a space for the arts. The vaults were turned into one of the most atmospheric places in the city to see new art and performing. But with "The Memory Theater of Giulio Camillo," Creative Time moves into an elaborate new realm of theater.

Mr. Maguire's play, inspired by the Brooklyn anchorage, is based on the ideas of Giulio Camillo, a 16th-century architect and mystic whose theoretical explorations of human memory led to his construction of a "memory theater" under the patronage of François I. Camillo asserted that his theater possessed magical powers and that those entering would emerge with a memory of all the knowledge of the world. Mr. Maguire sees bridges as metaphors for memory. "Just as a bridge spans two points in space, so memory spans two points in time," the playwright explained.

In "The Memory Theater of Giulio Camillo," each of the anchorage's vaults becomes part of the labyrinthine paths of Camillo's mind, with commedia dell'arte players guiding the audience from one chamber to the next to watch the unfolding play, performed by seven actors and two musicians. One of those musicians is Vito Ricci, the composer for "Memory Theater," who will wheel through the proceedings with his red music trolley, assisting in the playing of a score composed for rhythm machines, synthesizer, electric bass and a prepared guitar played with a wrench and nail files. "It sounds like water falling into a pool, a crinkly sound," Mr. Maguire said of the guitar. "Or the beast stalking the taverns."

### "A Sincere Alchemist"

There is a monster in "Memory Theater," and his confrontation with Camillo ends the play, which Mr. Maguire describes as a fictional departure from the life of the real Camillo. The playwright's fascination with the nature of memory led to his discovery of Camillo's work and his memory theater, built of wood on the principles of a Vesuvian amphitheater and created first in Venice and then in

Paris in the Court of François I. In the theaters, the audience stood on the stage and gazed out at symbols and images ranked in rows in the raked auditorium, each object labeled with an ancient classic text to be remembered by its place within a spatial system. "Camillo was consumed by this idea," Mr. Maguire said. "He sounds like a charlatan, but I think he was a profoundly sincere alchemist."

In the play, the fictional Camillo has been haunted for seven sleepless years by a memory that seems to be eluding him. "He begins to search and chart his memory theater again," Mr. Maguire said. "Evidence begins to sift up of a memory of a murder he may have committed. The more he denies, the more his amnesia grows, until he is silent. His ability to speak has gone. At the end of the play, the beast runs through his theater, mangling and clawing, and Camillo is in danger of being shattered." Mr. Maguire sees parallels in the play to contemporary history. "I think moral amnesia is coming back in America," he said.

Lacking an appropriately fantastic setting for the play, Mr. Maguire worked on other theater projects until 1984, when Anita Contini, executive director of Creative Time, invited him to look over the anchorage with the idea of staging work there. "We like to use spaces with historical and architectural significance," Miss Contini said. "I brought a number of people to see the anchorage. I knew Matthew's work and he responded very immediately."

### Interested in Collaboration

Both Creative Time and the Creation Company, founded by Mr. Maguire and Susan Musakowski in 1977,

were interested in the possibilities of collaborations between visual and theater artists. Artists and architects were chosen out of over 100 considered for the project. Creative Time set about raising money for the \$100,000 production, which is supported by major grants from the city's Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Fund for the Borough of Brooklyn, as well as grants from the William and Mary Greve and Peg Santvoord Foundations. And Mr. Maguire began work on "Memory Theater," producing parts of it at LaMama and at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

The chambers of the anchorage, like catacombs, old walled prisons and turn-of-the-century railroad stations, are as eerie and awesome as ever. But they have been transformed into sets for the play that make them even more mysterious. In one set, designed by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzler, the actors will climb a ramp and move through a curtain of water onto a raked platform over which hangs strange floating discs and a javelin, with a huge, glowing globe looming beyond in the vault's vast recesses. A distant red ladder, Camillo's "impossible stairway," runs to the top of the vault's high arch. Allan Wexler's blue and white "pure house" may be found in another chamber. Dotted with antic props, the anchorage also holds a three-level trompe l'oeil miniature stage, a huge camera obscura, a "throne room" made of wire-mesh bricks, a canal and fountain, a walk-through Pantheon facade, a set of inverted mirror rooms and a bridge from which performers will swing, presided over by two seated, swiveling figures. The de-

signers also include Joe Fyfe, Laurie Hawkinson, Kit-Yin Snyder, Elyn Zimmerman, Elizabeth Diller and Riccardo Scofield.

The testing ground for the concept was Creative Time's Art on the Beach, which became a city landmark during its seven summers of art and performance outdoors on the Battery Park landfill, which was reclaimed for development last fall. Art on the Beach will be resumed next summer at Hunter's Point, and Creative Time will present a dance and performance art series this August and September in the Naumberg Bandshell in Central Park. But until then, there is "The Memory Theater of Giulio Camillo," which promises to be one of the most provocative and magical celebrations of the city and its artists ever presented by Creative Time.

"The Memory Theater of Giulio Camillo" will be performed tonight through Sunday at 7:30 P.M. and Wednesdays through Sundays at 7:30 P.M. through June 29. Admission is \$8 Fridays through Sundays and \$6 Wednesdays and Thursdays. There is room for only 75 people at each performance. Reservations are required and may be made by calling (212) 619-1955. Information: (212) 571-2206. The installations are on view Wednesdays through Saturdays from noon to 6 P.M. and Sundays from noon to 3 P.M., closed on July 4. There will be jazz concerts in the anchorage on Sundays through June at 4 P.M., starting this Sunday. Admission is \$6. No reservations are necessary.

The chambers of the anchorage, like catacombs, old walled prisons and turn-of-the-century railroad stations, are as eerie and awesome as ever. But they have been transformed into sets for the play that make them even more mysterious. In one set, designed by Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzler, the actors will climb a ramp and move through a curtain of water onto a raked platform over which hangs strange floating discs and a javelin, with a huge, glowing globe looming beyond in the vault's vast recesses. A distant red ladder, Camillo's "impossible stairway," runs to the top of the vault's high arch.