



Nada Gets the Boot

Cash-Strapped Downtown Theater Evicted After 12 Years

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On November 14, a city marshal shut down Nada. The Ludlow Street theater, no stranger to money woes, was unable to pay nearly \$19,000 in back rent. The landlord, Ludlow Properties, now controls the space. Despite the closing, Nada artistic director Aaron Beall is hoping that a capital campaign to raise a year's advance rent might open the venue's doors again. Though a famously cramped theater,

with performances punctuated by street noise and the clomping of upstairs neighbors, Nada played a vital role in the downtown community. The space, recently renamed Nada Classic, produced two or three shows a night, seven days a week. Almost anyone who's written, acted, or directed downtown over the past 12 years probably worked at Nada at some point. Target Margin, Deb Margolin, Reno, Elevator Repair Service, Todd Alcott, Arden Party, John Leguizamo, Marc Spitz, and the Neo-Futurists are just a few of the artists who mounted shows in the space. (Fittingly, one of the last plays presented at Nada was a revival of *Crowbar*, Mac Wellman's Obie-winning play about a closed, haunted theater.) Nada was relatively inexpensive to rent, and served as a real theatrical laboratory. Some shows were good, lots were bad, but people got a chance to learn their craft.

photo: Tara Engberg



Off with the show: Nada's closed Ludlow Street theater

Nada began in 1988 as Theater Club Funambules, founded by Beall, Tim Carryer, and Babs Bailey. After Carryer and Bailey

departed in 1991, the theater changed its name to Nada (then later to *Todo con Nada*). In 1997, the Nada empire expanded to include the Piano Store, at 158 Ludlow, and the House of Candles, around the corner at 99 Stanton Street (sites now rented to other tenants). Beall also briefly ran Nada 45, at 445 West 45th Street, and currently operates Nada Show World, in the remains of the vaunted Times Square porn palace.

Like many theaters, Nada often had difficulty paying its rent, now \$2875 per month. The gentrification of Ludlow Street—which Nada helped kindle—and the 1997 sale of the building to Ludlow Properties intensified pressure on the space. (Ludlow Properties did not return phone calls seeking comment.)

Nada had been in and out of court for years, the theater's rent battles as much a part of its lore as the windowless basement that housed site director Ian Hill and the random Ludlow Street rat. But the

landlord hasn't been the only person with money complaints. Some artists who've worked at the Nada theaters over the past few years have their own financial laments. Graham Brown, who produced his shows *Tripping* and *Seascape With Shark and Dancer* at Nada and the Piano Store in the fall of 1999, says Beall still owes him \$916 in box office. Tim Cusack, who curated a festival of Ridiculous Theater revivals last July, claims Beall has not paid him between \$1000 and \$1500 in box office. Susan Bowen says she's yet to see her \$600 in box office for the September-October 1999 run of her show *Scratch*. Laura Penney claims she has not received any of her box office from 42 performances of her show *What a Piece of Work Is Dan*, which ran at Nada Show World from May to October of 1999. Beall admits that he owes Brown, Cusack, and Bowen money, though he disputes Penney's claim, because of a disagreement over the installation of some lighting equipment. "All debts will be paid," Beall insists. "All the money has gone to keep Nada alive." Beall sounds sincere in his desire to pay people back, though some aggrieved artists claim he makes box office deals he knows he can't keep. (By way of disclosure, I had two plays presented at Nada, both good experiences.)

Verse playwright Kirk Wood Bromley, who once worked on the Nada staff, says he's thankful for the opportunities Beall gave both him and many others. He believes Nada's troubles come from mismanagement and failure to pursue grants (he also describes Beall as a "papyrophobe"—resistant to putting anything down on paper). Downtown theater folks have become "burned out" on Nada's troubles, he says, and production energy has shifted to venues like the St. Marks Theater and the Kraine.

Beall hopes his fundraising drive to pay the next year's rent up front will appease Ludlow Properties. Should the theater revive, he's hoping to improve its vibe with yet another name change, this time from Nada to Todo Downtown.

