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## Theater Photo Archive Lost Amid the Rubble

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

They are not people, only pictures of people, and so may barely rate mention as collateral damage in the wreckage that has claimed so many lives. But in an office building crushed last week by the collapsing 7 World Trade Center lie some 35,000 photographs capturing some great moments on the American stage.

The archive, inaccessible and probably ruined, was one of the largest collections of photographs of Broadway, Off and Off Off Broadway and regional theater. It was in the offices of Broadway Digital Entertainment, a company that had been preserving videotapes of historic theatrical productions that appeared on television, at 30 West Broadway, a block away from 7 World Trade Center, which collapsed after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The videotapes, 320 in all, in various stages of preservation, were not in the office and escaped destruction, said Basil Hero, Broadway Digital's president and chief executive, who was in the office when the first plane hit and fled to the street in time to be showered by debris when the second plane plowed through the south tower.

The photographs, memorializing a 30-year-slice of theater history from the 1970's to February 2000, had been assembled by the magazine Theater Week and, after it ceased publication in 1997, augmented by a successor magazine, InTheater, which folded last year. Broadway Digital then bid on the collection, winning out over a well-heeled rival, Microsoft, which owns other photo archives. Mr. Hero declined to say how much his company had paid.

The backstage and publicity photos depict the original casts of hits like "A Chorus Line" and "Miss Saigon" as well as players in small gay productions and a multitude of regional theaters. In theory, Mr. Hero said, it might be possible to duplicate the collection, "but we'd have to contact 8,000 organizations around the country."

He said the photos were in file drawers in the company's 14th-floor offices, which were crushed under the collapsed ceiling, along with computers documenting the collection.

Since its founding in 1997 Broadway Digital, which began as Broadway Theater Archive, has painstakingly assembled and cleared the rights to digitize and market for rebroadcast 320 television shows, including classics like a 1960 production of "The Iceman Cometh" with Jason Robards and Robert Redford. The first group of broadcasts is scheduled to begin on Oct. 28 on Trio, a cable and satellite



*Broadway Digital Entertainment, CEO,  
Basil Hero, in a temporary office in  
midtown.*

channel for the arts. PBS is to present "Death of a Salesman," "A Moon for the Misbegotten" and other classics starting in January. (For more information: [www.broadwayarchive.com](http://www.broadwayarchive.com).)

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