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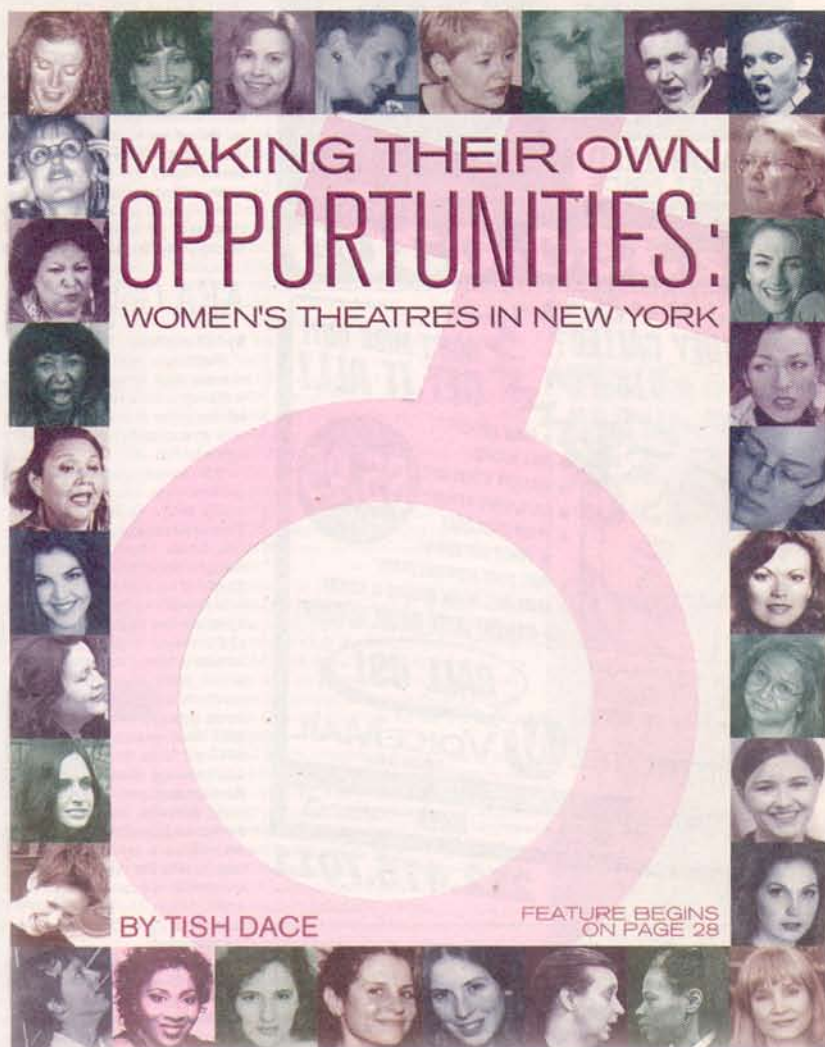
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## MAKING THEIR OWN OPPORTUNITIES:

WOMEN'S THEATRES IN NEW YORK

BY TISH DACE

FEATURE BEGINS ON PAGE 28

Thirty years ago, New York boasted only a handful of women's theatres. Over the following decade, companies came and went, but the numbers remained the same. Recently, however, the Big Apple's women's theatres have proliferated so much that including them all in one article is no longer possible. Here, Back Stage correspondent Tish Dace—in her ninth annual International Women's Day/Women's History Month feature on women in theatre—samples 20 of the city's current roster.

### BY TISH DACE

Women started creating their own theatres in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The *New Feminist Repertory* gave weekly performances in 1969, and the *Westbeth Playwrights Feminist Collective* began producing in 1971. Other early women's companies included *It's All Right to Be Woman* and *Womanrite*. These theatres strove to raise women's consciousness and change the way the world worked.



Sasha Eden and Victoria Pettibone of Women's Expressive Theater (WET).

Many women's theatres have defined their missions more loosely. Sasha Eden and Victoria Pettibone began *Women's Expressive Theatre* (cheekily dubbed "WET") "to promote sisterhood and empower," in Eden's words, and in Pettibone's, "to respect diversity among all women." They aim to give women free expression and avoid stereotypes by celebrating women's intelligence and power and sexiness. "People smile at the name WET," Eden reports. A youthful, hip company inspired by Eve Ensler, Daryl Roth, and Anna Devere Smith, they also have fulfilled Pettibone's desire to produce and Eden's yen for better roles. She says, "Doing an episode on 'Dawson's Creek' didn't make me feel I was helping womankind. Here, I can combine my passions for women's rights and theatre." Pettibone explains, "We put women in a prominent place, but we hire men too." Optimistic about the market for women's plays, they cite the successful "Vagina Monologues." Optimism seems their watchword; says Pettibone, "Young women feel we can do whatever we want to do."