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My first time

The entertainment business is alive and well. There are new kids with concentrated dedication, perseverance, brains, talent, practical smarts, strong educational backgrounds and training starting from when they were very young.

This leads me to thinking about movies versus stage plays, and one can argue for the rest of forever which is more vital, relevant, important and satisfying in fulfilling the basic needs of 'man needs more than bread alone to live', and the answer inevitably is: it's a tie — they are both equal, at least potentially so, in theory — it's a matter of which one has within it a better work of art at any given time.

True, movies (and TV) are mass appeal and stage shows are attended by much fewer audiences, but that is a recent phenomenon (only the last 100 years or so) driven in large measure by fascination with the new technologies, but there is something about being in the same room and breathing the same air with the performers while experiencing it 'live' that is uniquely enriching on a personal level — but then again movies have close-ups that can break through the artificial separation between the performer and the audience, and movies can bring all kinds of real locations into the telling of the story.

We all have our indelible memories from both — a few of mine (in movies) are Greta Garbo in "Camille", Charlie Chaplin in "Modern Times", Humphrey Bogart in "Casablanca", Ingrid Bergman in "Anastasia", Kevin Costner in "Field of Dreams", the old guys making a comeback in "Buena Vista Social Club" and the famous last line in "Some Like It Hot" — 'Nobody's perfect'. (In stage shows): Lawrence Olivier in John Osborne's "The Entertainer", Judith Jameson in Alvin Ailey's "Revelations", Edward G. Robinson in Paddy Chayevsky's "Middle of the Night", Lotte Lenya in "The Three Penny Opera", Gregory Hines in my production of "Sophisticated Ladies", Lucecita Benítez ("The Voice Of Puerto Rico") in my production in Puerto Rico of "Murderous Instincts" (now renamed "Family Fortune" and headed for Broadway) and Stew in the current hit on Broadway, "Passing Strange". In New York this week I attended performances Off-Broadway of "My First Time" and "Altar Boyz" and the ensembles in both shows are now on my all-time most memorable list, both are produced by the hottest new kid on the block, Ken Davenport, who also adapted and directed "My First Time" and co-conceived "Altar Boyz". Ken Davenport was recently described in the New York Times as 'the PT Barnum of Off-Broadway', and was named



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one of Crane's '40 Under 40', and is one of the few producers to have three shows running simultaneously — the third being "The Awesome 80s Prom", which I haven't seen yet but I will.

There is much more to write about this rising superstar 'Man Of Theatre' (movies in the works), Ken Davenport, than this column has space for, but I will in future columns go into much greater detail because he's so deeply grounded in his profession both as artist (having started out as an actor) and businessman (all his shows are profitable) that all the aspiring new kids in Puerto Rico can learn from him.

For now, I will let you in on "My First Time". It is based on a universal experience which everyone on the planet has had or will have in some form, and it is not one single bit smutty, and there is no offense to anyone's morality, and it is wide and deep in encompassing the full universe of individuals, and the cast is always elegant and believable, and the angst that virtually everyone in the audience brings in, by the end of the show is relieved and made to feel ok about. It is now also playing all over the world from Korea to Brazil to audiences of all ages including huge numbers of high school students, from Sri Lanka to Schenectady who are enjoying it and appreciating it enormously.

"My First Time" is totally original and contemporary and funny on a subject as old as the hills.

Would you like to know what "My First Time" is about? You have to go see it to find out, but I guarantee you'll be delighted by it and you will have renewed confidence that the new kids around are making the world we know into a better place.

Manny Fox, born in the Bronx, N.Y., is a Broadway veteran with producer credits including the hit musical Duke Ellington's "Sophisticated Ladies." His columns, Diary of a Producer and Hollywood Correspondent, appear on alternating Mondays. Readers may contact him at manny1@caribe.net.