

OFF THE RECORD

Positively 53rd Street

BOB DYLAN AND TROTSKY may seem an unlikely pair, but that will change with the

release this week of Dylan's excellent new album, *Oh Mercy*. The record's cover features a mural by Trotsky, a New York artist who was born on the thirty-sixth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

Trotsky—yes, that's his given name, and he won't divulge his surname—has been painting colorful, expressionistic murals on the

walls of Hell's Kitchen for four years. In July, his eight-by-twelve-foot rendering of a



Trotsky with the mural that got Dylan's attention.

dancing couple at the corner of Ninth Avenue and 53rd Street caught Dylan's eye as he rode his bike through the neighborhood. Dylan asked CBS to find the artist.

"I had just come from housing court, and I owed thousands of dollars in rent," Trotsky says. "I was just about to give up and move to Atlanta or Istanbul, and I get this phone call: 'CBS calling—we want to use one of your paintings for the Bob Dylan LP,' and I say, 'You're kidding

me; this is some cruel joke; go away, but give me your number and I'll call you back.' I called back and it ended up being the real thing."

In a backstage meeting, Dylan asked Trotsky for advice. "He said CBS was scared the title *Oh Mercy* sounded religious," Trotsky says. "I said *Oh Mercy* had guts and feeling, and it matched the art."

Trotsky had painted murals in his hometown of Washington, D.C., and on the West German side of the Berlin Wall before creating the dancers across the street from his apartment. His newest mural, on the corner of Broadway and 49th Street, is a statement on New York's racial problems. "Every artist should communicate to make people aware, whatever the medium," Trotsky says—a sentiment clearly shared by Dylan: The first song on *Oh Mercy* is called "Political World." **LAUREN SPENCER**

CASTING CALL

Looking for Mr. and Mrs. Right

JOHAN RUBINSTEIN DID IT first with Joanna Gleason—and later with Kathleen Turner and Stockard Channing. Swoosie Kurtz enjoyed it so much that she did it with her friend Richard Thomas all week long.

And so it goes, night after night, at the Promenade Theatre, thanks to Off Broadway's most successful matchmaker: Linda Wright, casting director for A. R. Gurney's *Love Letters*. What started out as a one-night stand every Monday at the Promenade has blossomed into an eight-week run ending October 15.

"It's become like this marvelous dance," says Wright, 43. Before she landed a job in producer Richard Frankel's office on West 57th Street, she worked in Durham, North Carolina, as a liaison between Duke University and several

Broadway producers. In her first full-fledged role as a casting director, she keeps a list of around 75 actors who would like, have been asked, or would be perfect to play Andrew Makepeace Ladd III and Melissa Gardner, Gurney's top-drawer Wasps. Through their lively exchange of chatty, literate letters, Andy and Melissa have become a pair of nondominational Abelard and Héloïse for the eighties.

So far, 54 different actors have played the parts. Everyone from William Hurt to Barbara Barrie gets the same salary and the same three-hour Sunday-afternoon run-through with director John Tillinger.

Since the characters start out young and grow old together, Wright tries to keep the actors the same age. One big star balked after being told he couldn't do it with someone 30 years his junior.

And egos can be egos. Christopher Plummer said absolutely no when he heard that other actors had already performed the piece. "He said he would not be 'compared' to anyone else," Wright says. Christopher Reeve was less

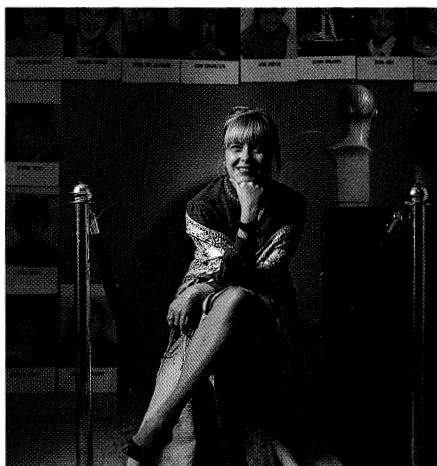
suggested. "He was very picky," Wright says.

But for all the creative Cupid-playing by Wright, nothing beats word of mouth—and good luck. Elaine Stritch read with Jason Robards and sent the play to

Woody Allen, who then gave it to Mia Farrow, who's now down as a possibility in Wright's little black book. "And when Jane Curtin was in town making *Kate & Allie*, I sent the script over to her," says Wright. "She got it at 5:30 and called me at nine o'clock to say, 'When should I be there?'"

Jane does it with Edward

Herrmann eight times this week. **RICHARD DAVID STORY**



Linda Wright and her cast of dozens.

than enthusiastic after an actress of a certain age was