



Dallas Theater Center

MARCH 16-MAY 16

DEATH OF A
SALESMAN

BY:
ARTHUR MILLER

DIRECTED BY:
AMANDA DEHNERT

THIS SCRIPT BELONGS TO:
SALLY VAHLE

Production Photos
Death of a Salesman

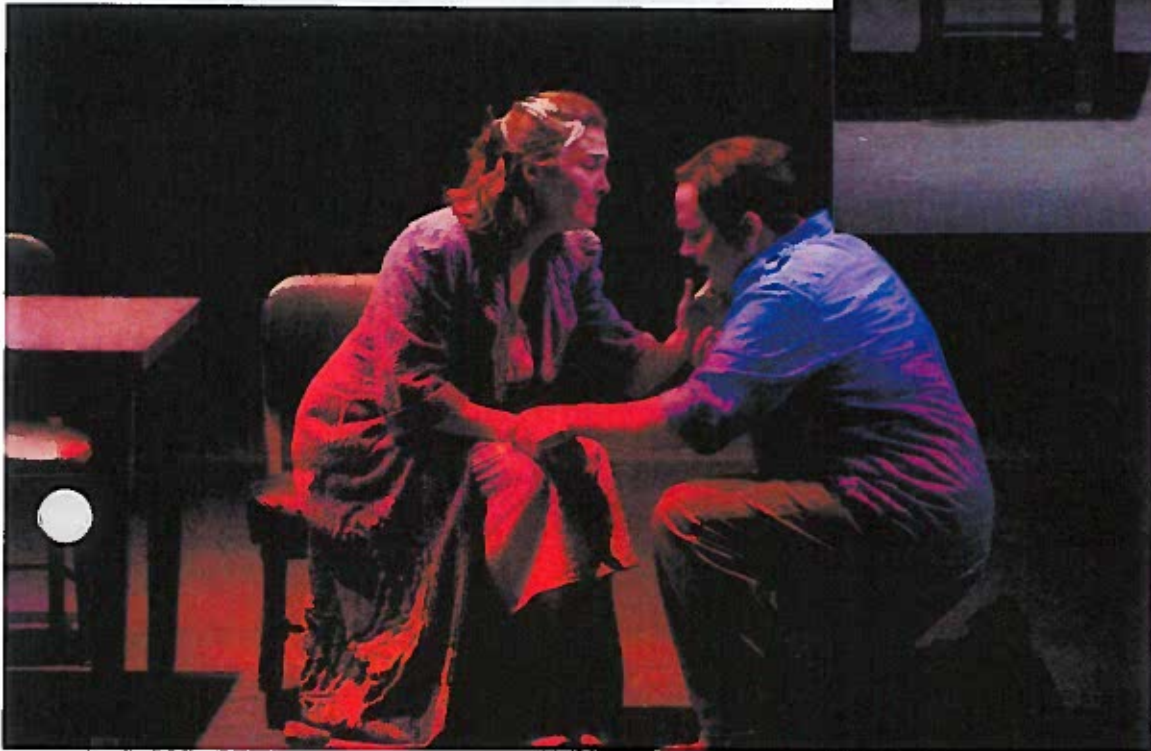
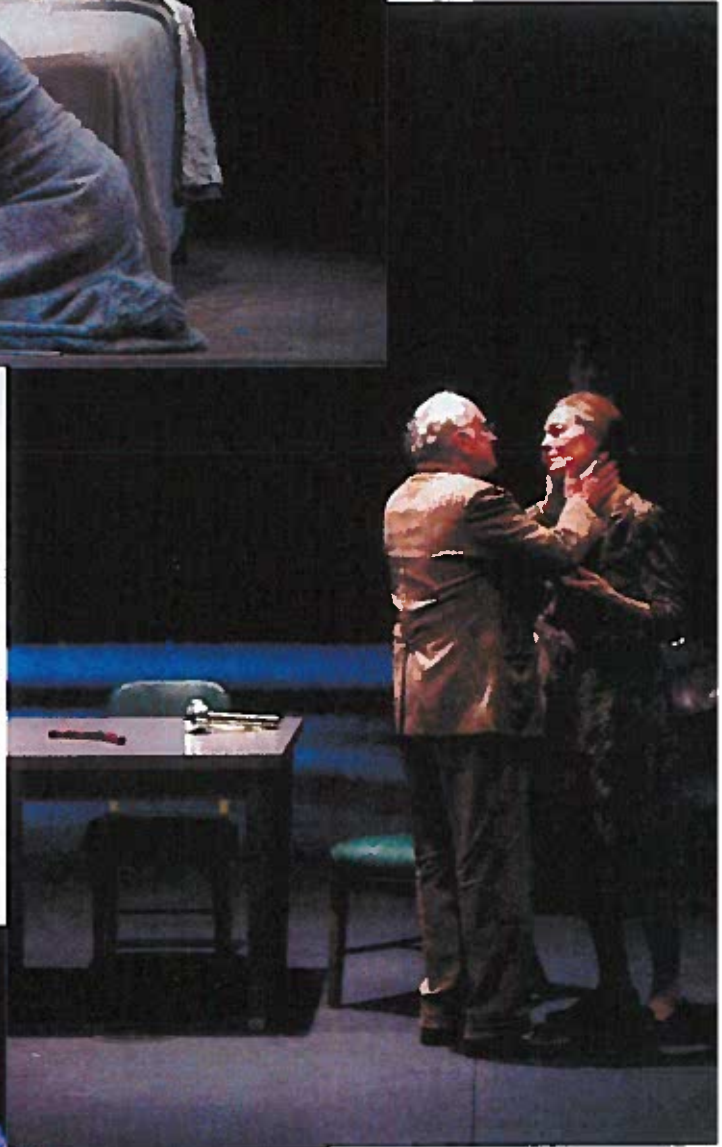
Photographer: Justin Thibodeaux

In photos:

Sally Vahle

Jeffrey DeMunn

Matthew Gray



We Like You! We Really Like You!

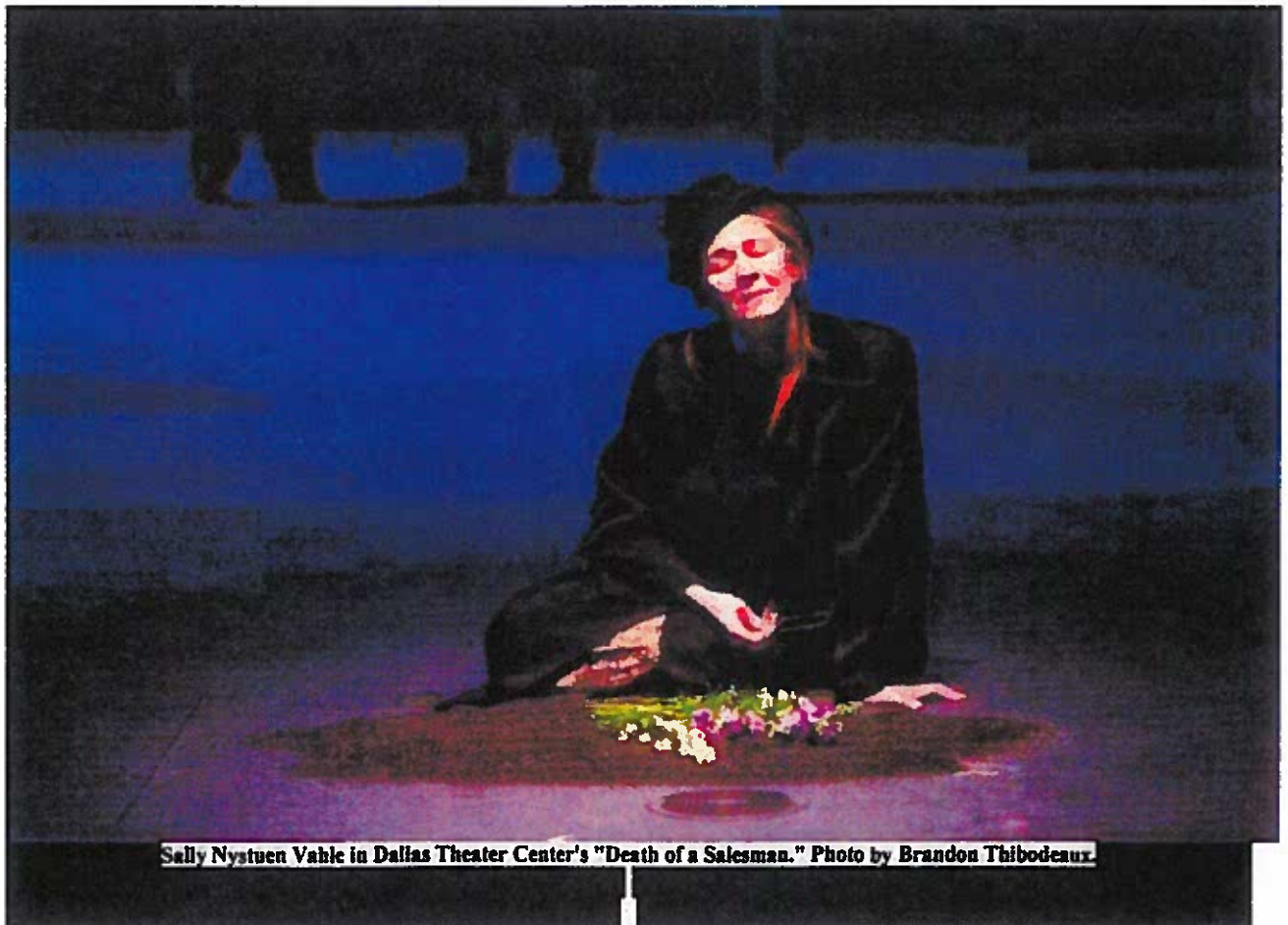
Here are the winners for the annual Dallas-Fort Worth Theater Critics Forum Awards.

by Mark Lowry

Published Wednesday, September 15, 2010

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE BY AN ACTRESS

- Pam Dougherty, *The Full Monty* and *Grey Gardens* (both at WaterTower Theatre)
- Kristin Dausch, *Funny Girl* (Lyric Stage)
- Marianne Galloway, *Rabbit Hole* (Contemporary Theatre of Dallas)
- Liz Mikel, *Black Pearl Sings!* (WaterTower Theatre) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Dallas Theater Center)
- Trisha Miller, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Trinity Shakespeare Festival)
- Jennifer Powers, *It's a Bird... It's a Plane... It's Superman* (Dallas Theater Center)
- Cara Statham Serber, *It's a Bird... It's a Plane... It's Superman* (Dallas Theater Center)
- Diana Sheehan, *Grey Gardens* (WaterTower Theatre)
- **Sally Nystuen Vahle, *Death of a Salesman* (Dallas Theater Center)**
- Wendy Welch, *Forbidden Broadway's Greatest Hits* (Uptown Players)



Sally Nystuen Vahle in Dallas Theater Center's "Death of a Salesman." Photo by Brandon Thibodeaux.

The Dallas Morning News

Theater review:

Dallas Theater's 'Death of a Salesman' is a starkly powerful production

09:08 AM CDT on Saturday, April 24, 2010

By LAWSON TAITTE / The Dallas Morning News

ltaitte@dallasnews.com

For several generations now, students have slogged out papers debating whether *Death of a Salesman* fits the classic definition of a tragedy. In the Dallas Theater's new production, it's a foregone conclusion: Arthur Miller's play gets precisely the same treatment the company might give *Oedipus Rex* or *King Lear*.

Designer Daniel Ostling gives us no scenery in the traditional sense. Frankly visible stagehands move pieces of furniture on and off the thrust stage. Great panels slide back and forth behind the acting area to demarcate the changes between present and past, reality and memory.

With one exception, director Amanda Dehnert has cast the play with company members or Southern Methodist University students. The actor's race and body type don't seem to matter much, and the style is formal rather than naturalistic.

If you're comfortable with this approach to what still feels like an up-to-the-moment look at American life and values, the production that opened Friday is a starkly powerful one.

The salesman at the center of the tragedy, Willy Loman, is both very large (in his own imagination) and very small (in the mark he makes on the world). The show's single guest star, Jeffrey DeMunn, doesn't have the physical bulk to suggest the character's paradoxical grandeur. But he's extremely effective in showing us the man's collapse, and he makes the transitions between fantasy and reality quite clear. Miller first wanted to call this play *In His Head*, after all.

The heroic thrust in this interpretation comes from Sally Nystuen Vahle as Willy's wife, Linda, and Sean Hennigan as his neighbor, Charlie. Most Lindas are older performers who spruce up to pass for younger in the flashbacks. Vahle looks shockingly old when we first see her, partly because we know she's not. Playing the younger Linda, closer to her own actual age, Vahle is wonderfully warm, protective and even witty.

Dallas Theatre Center's *Death of a Salesman* Is Low Tragedy Writ Large

Author: *By David Novinski, D Magazine*

Post date: April 27th, 2010 10:44am

Everything's bigger in Texas. When Dallas Theatre Center takes on an American classic like *Death of a Salesman*, you know they'll go big. You just might not expect them to go big with emptiness, but that's just what they did. Scenic designer Daniel Ostling gives director Amanda Dehnert a stage filled with space. Depending on how you feel about their choices, you may see this production as low tragedy writ large or just much ado about nothing.

It's a funny thing, scale. It's the relationship between how big something is to the world around it. In director Dehnert's version, Willy loses sense of how big he is. Sometimes he sees himself as a man of consequence recognized throughout his territory. Other times he loses his bearings and gets swallowed. Broadway import Jeffrey DeMunn has reduced Willy Loman to three recognizable notes: pride, anger and bewilderment and he can switch between them instantly, heartbreakingly. The opening night audience was fearful for this late model man of the road from the outset recognizing the faulty memory, mood swings and dementia. These things ring louder today than they did in 1949 when the average life expectancy was shorter by ten years. The audience can see where Willy is headed because of our too personal experience with aging and its effects.

Interestingly, the play becomes less about him because of that. As his narrative potential diminishes, Linda Loman becomes more intriguing. Sally Nystuen Vahle plays the long-suffering wife with sensitive strength. Her Linda can heroically surrender to her husband with soothing grace and still overwhelm her two grown sons when the circumstances warrant. When the end comes, all that strength-breaking takes the audience over the edge. The spell held even as the audience shuffled out, keeping the conversations hushed, appropriately respectful as if returning from a funeral, a salesman's funeral, a requiem for the American dream.

Miller's classic is a wonderbread wonderland normally, but DTC has seen fit to pepper the salt and give this play ebony and ivory keyboard casting in many roles. There's no rhyme or reason to the monochromatic color-blind casting, though you may spend a lot of time trying to figure it out. In the end, the colors matter less than the types. Biff, for instance, isn't shaped like the Adonis he is constantly compared to. And each time, it takes us out of the play for a minute, especially in the flashback football star scenes. This clumsy casting smacked of a summer stock company who'd painted themselves into a corner casting-wise, the long season leaving the pool of players limited. Especially inappropriate because Miller takes pains to reduce his plot and prose to the essentials so as to make his axe sharper.

DTC's Salesman Has The Goods

By Elaine Liner Thursday, May 6 2010

The Dallas Theater Center's production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is a harder sell than a new grand opera about a Great White Whale. The night I saw the play, there were 150 patrons in the 575-seat Wyly Theatre.

But whatever reasons you thought you had for not wanting to spend an evening with this 1949 tragedy about a 60-year-old man losing his mind and the only job he's ever had, forget them. You must see it. Go tonight. It isn't just the best production yet on the main stage at the Wyly (the theater opened last October), it's the best big piece of drama by DTC since Kevin Moriarty took the job as artistic director of the company three years ago.

The actors, all but one local, are exceptionally strong. In the lead as Willy Loman is New York import Jeffrey DeMunn, wearing padding under his rumpled brown suit but still recognizable from appearances on TV's *Law & Order* and in the films *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*. From his entrance, dropping two heavy sample cases as he returns home from the road, DeMunn's Willy Loman is stooped and fragile. DeMunn is an actor of slight build anyway—more Dustin Hoffman than Brian Dennehy—and he shrinks further as the weight of memories and delusions bear down. At one point in the second act, DeMunn sinks to his knees, dwarfed by the vast expanse of black floor around him. It is a sad and stunning image, one of many in this production. (Scenic designer Daniel Ostling, keeping the large space free of clutter, pulls off one visual knockout after another.)

This *Salesman* is worth seeing for DeMunn; he's that good. But surrounding and supporting him are 11 other fine actors, some DTC company members, some drama students from Southern Methodist University. Under the direction of Amanda Dehnert, this cast does surgically precise, intensely connected ensemble work.

Miller's play presents staggering challenges. Willy's sons Biff and Happy (played by DTC company actors Matthew Gray and Cedric Neal) jump in flashbacks from their 30s to their teens. **Willy and wife Linda (DTC company member Sally Nystuen Vahle) also turn back the clock, looking and behaving 20 years younger than in most of the play. Vahle handles the transitions particularly well, taking a fresh, quiet but firm approach as the one member of the Loman family who lives in the here and now. In the "attention must be paid" speech, pleading for some kindness toward Willy, she is like no other Linda I've ever seen. She's better.**

The only gimmick here is the "colorblind casting" of African-American actors as son Happy and as Willy's wealthy older brother Ben (Hassan El-Amin). But Miller himself claimed that these characters exist only in Willy's mind. So why not make them literally and visually "other"?

Review: Dallas Theater Center's 'Death of a Salesman' is riveting

- April 26th, 2010 11:11 am CT
- By Marilee Vergati

The Dallas Theater Center's "Death of a Salesman" is a powerful interpretation of Arthur Miller's celebrated American classic. Tony nominated actor Jeffrey DeMunn's portrayal of Willy Loman is close to perfection. He captures the tragic hero who declares he's just a "little boat looking for a harbor." From his subtle mannerisms and posture, to his frustrated outbursts flowing into quiet moments of uncomfortable raw honesty, DeMunn remains believable and real. His natural style conveys a man in decline suffering from delusions, unfulfilled dreams, while waiting a lifetime to be noticed.

DTC's commanding production shines under the astute artistic direction of Kevin Moriarty and guest director Amanda Dehnert. The innovative 12-level Wyly Theatre provides dramatic lighting and unique staging with stunning and stark visual images. The minimalist sets strip the characters from conventional stage environments and props leaving them vulnerable, exposed and raw.

Matthew Gray plays Loman's son Biff who falls prey to his father's misguided delusions and pressure to succeed. During the flashbacks he fails to fully convey a high school football star's bravado. At times he seems too immature. However Gray's interactions with DeMunn while playing Biff in his adult role is emotionally gripping. Cedric Neal aptly portrays his brother Happy. Neal's dysfunctional character alternates between balancing the tightrope walk of humoring a sick man's delusions with ugly realities. Liz Mikel, the other woman, is forceful and memorable. Hassan el-Amin portrays Uncle Ben whose powerful presence is reminiscent of James Earl Jones' stage dominance. **Sally Nystuen Vahle's Linda Loman is the strong, long suffering wife who genuinely loves her flawed husband. Her quiet understated performance is compelling.**

"Death of a Salesman" exposes the character's lives in series of flashbacks, present time action and through the eyes of a delusional mind. One of the most powerful scenes occurs when Willy Loman finally measures the value of his life and walks into the light. The following sound effects and symbolic imagery is so forceful that audience reaction is heard throughout the theater. Miller's play explores the dark underbelly of the American Dream and a man who struggles with the invisibility of being average. His downfall and plummeting sense of worth is chilling. The Dallas Theater Center's production is relevant, powerful; and, during its best moments profound.

Grand delusions

Posted on 29 Apr 2010

By ARNOLD WAYNE JONES, The Dallas Voice

The delusions in *Death of a Salesman* are of a less whimsical variety. Willy Loman (Jeffrey DeMunn) seems to be suffering from early-stage dementia, exacerbated by his failing career. He's been suicidal, too, kept in check by his wife Linda (Sally Nystuen Vahle) but haunted by the strained relationships with his sons (Matthew Gray, Cedric Neal).

Director Amanda Dehnert has made some peculiar staging decisions, having sets awkwardly pulling into the center while the action continues; leaving the stagehands visible throughout the production; setting most of the action far upstage in the thrust, as if isolating the characters from the audience as well as each other. I get it, but it overdoes the portent of the piece, and it's as portentous as American theater gets already: Along with Albee's *The Zoo Story*, the book *Catcher in the Rye* and many films noir, *Salesman* embodied the non-specific post-war angst that didn't find its full expression until a November day in Dealey Plaza.

DeMunn makes for a convincing, fairly sympathetic Loman, but he's both seriously upstaged and at his best when he's sharing scenes with Vahle. If there has ever been a better Linda — and I mean, ever — I am not aware of it. At three hours without much laughter, *Salesman* can feel oppressive, but when we're in Vahle's presence, it's as if drifting into a world without time. She reinvents the "attention must be paid" speech so naturally, it effectively refocused the play for me. This *Great American Tragedy* makes much more sense now. That's some seriously transformative acting.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN OPENS IN DALLAS

by GARY COGILL

WFAA-TV

Posted on April 23, 2010 at 10:00 PM Updated Friday, Apr 23 at 3:49 PM

A Pulitzer Prize-winning classic by Arthur Miller opens Friday at the Wyly Theatre in Dallas.

The Dallas Theatre Center's production of "Death Of A Salesman" is emotional and powerful.

The play is a monumental piece of American theater and the current staging at the Wyly is a powerhouse production.

At center stage, you'll find film and Broadway veteran, Jeffrey DeMunn, as Willy Loman.

He is a dreamer in crisis: a failing salesman with a wife who loves him dearly and two confused sons.

DeMunn's performance is so spot on, so multi-layered, so complicated, it's a marvel to watch. So is resident actress, Sally Vahle, as his wife, Linda Loman.

This stark, compelling, intimate production builds tension like a pressure cooker and includes a knock-out performance by Matthew Gray as the wandering son, Biff.

Director Amanda Dehnert's choice to use lighting for location, rather than building a literal set, is a stroke of genius that ultimately pays off in Miller's tragic conclusion.

"Death Of A Salesman" runs three hours with an intermission, and you won't find a better local ensemble of actors anywhere, anytime.

Tough Sell

Dallas Theater Center's *Death of a Salesman* doesn't live up to the play's power.

by Mark Lowry

published Friday, April 30, 2010

Death of a Salesman

Although Kevin Moriarty is not the director of the Dallas Theater Center's current staging of The Great American Play—a.k.a. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*—it feels very much like a product of the Moriarty Era. He is all about creating a conversation, even if he thrusts it unwillingly upon the audience, as with 2009's *In the Beginning*.

In the Amanda Dehnert-directed production of *Death*, the topic of bold casting will make up the bulk of the post-show conversation, as witnessed at intermission and following the performance reviewed. And that's great. Except that the conversation about the against-type casting choices—most notably with the sons of Willy and Linda Loman—becomes overly analytical, leaving viewers confused and unsure what to make of it all.

And therein lies the central problem with this production. Here's a masterpiece that, some 60 years after it was written, still speaks of the ever-elusive American dream in profound ways. No other American drama has even come close. But, on many levels, this staging feels so experimental and outside-the-box that the drama's power is diluted. Restrained, even.

Death of a Salesman doesn't need to create a conversation. It *is* the conversation.

Willy Loman (New York import and stage and film actor Jeffrey DeMunn) is the character of the play's title, a man of retirement age who has carved out the typical life of someone who has worked hard to provide a decent life for his family, **including wife Linda (the more-brilliant-than-ever Sally Nystuen Vahle)**, and adult sons Biff (Matthew Gray) and Happy (Cedric Neal). The scenes play out in Willy's present life (late 1940s) and in flashbacks and conversations (there's that word again!) in his head with other characters, including his brother Ben (Hassan El-Amin), who became self-made by finding a diamond mine in Africa.

Dehnert highlights this kind of non-linear, almost stream-of-consciousness tragedy with a stark production, using minimal set pieces (scenic design by Daniel Ostling) that are rolled out and back by black-clad stagehands, who almost become additional characters in one man's mindscape. The lighting, by Lap Chi Chu, sets the scenes more than anything else, and, as needed, differentiate between Willy's real world and his imagination. Costumes, by Jessica Ford, are basic, of the period and fitting.

Every scene in this play—nay, every sentence, every word—is a model for the kind of craft to which every playwright should aspire. The power in something as simple as Willy saying that, just once, he'd like to have something that doesn't break before it's paid off, cuts to the bone. In this current economy (and pretty much at any time in our country's history), as old-timers and more mature employees with institutional knowledge are weeded out of the workforce to make way for energetic young bucks who are willing to work for less, this play hits home. The dream is always there, just barely out of reach.