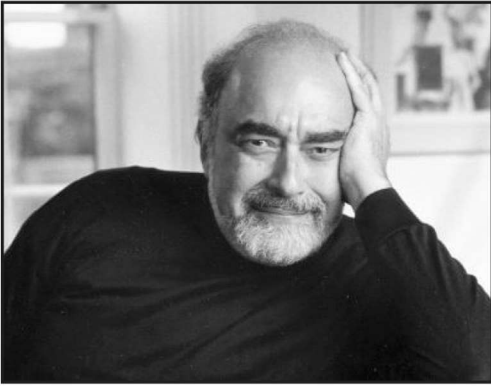


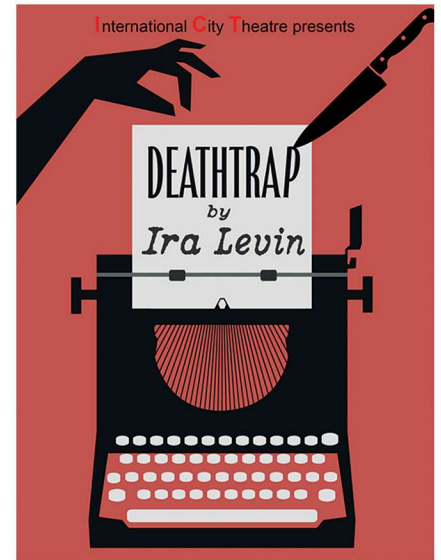
Ira Levin

(1929-2007)



Ira Marvin Levin was a novelist and playwright, born in New York City in 1929. He grew up in both Manhattan and the Bronx, the son of a toy importer. As a child, Levin was more interested in being a magazine illustrator than taking over his father's toy business, but by the age of 15, he had set his sights firmly on making a career as a writer. As a college student, Levin studied philosophy and English, attending Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa before graduating from New York University in 1950.

Levin was 23 when he wrote his first novel, the award-winning 1953 thriller *A Kiss Before Dying*, which remains a masterpiece of crime fiction to this day. It won the Edgar Award for best first novel of the year, and was an immediate bestseller; it was twice adapted for film, in 1956 and 1991. *A Kiss Before Dying* was published just as Levin was being drafted into the Army Signal Corps, where he wrote and produced training films for the military, and began turning his artistic attention to Broadway. His first play, *No Time For Sergeants*, was an adaptation of a now-forgotten novel by Mac Hyman, and ran for over 700 performances in 1955, ultimately launching the career of its lead actor, Andy Griffith, and proving Levin's ability at crafting comedy - particularly in terms of dialogue. These artistic endeavors launched a career that spanned over 50 years, characterized by success as both a novelist and a playwright.



According to the UK's *Independent* newspaper, Levin was the king of the high-concept thriller. And although he produced more plays than he did novels (10 plays and seven novels), three of his novels were massive bestsellers, all of which were made into highly successful movies — *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), *The Stepford Wives* (1972), and *The Boys from Brazil* (1976). He was a Grand Master of the Mystery Writers of America, and won the Bram Stoker Award for a lifetime's achievement from the US Horror Writers Association. He is probably best remembered for *Rosemary's Baby*, about which he commented, "I feel guilty that *Rosemary's Baby* led to *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, etc. A whole generation has more belief in Satan. I don't believe in Satan. Of course, I didn't send back any of the royalty cheques..."

Despite such massive literary success, Levin remained more interested in the theatrical genre, regularly producing Broadway offerings every couple of years throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly to *Deathtrap's* Sidney Bruhl, Levin's playwriting career tapered off after his initial success: neither *Interlock* (1958), *General Seeger* (1962), nor the musical *Drat! That Cat!* (1966) ran in New York for longer than one week. Finding slightly more success with his later plays, Levin ultimately produced his greatest theatrical hit in 1978 with *Deathtrap*, which ran on Broadway for 1,809 performances between 1978 and 1982 before being made into a film with Michael Caine and Christopher Reeve. It was nominated for four Tony Awards in 1978: Best Play, Best Director, Featured Actor, and Featured Actress. *Deathtrap* is the 37th longest-running play in Broadway history to date, and the longest-running thriller. Levin is the recipient of three Edgar Allan Poe Awards, and served on the council of the Dramatists Guild until his death in 2007.