



THE MAKING OF ACTORS

Reading Anne Bogart and Kristin Linklater go at one another over actor training ("Balancing Acts," Jan. '01) is like Bentley and Toyota debating car-making. Both have good results and both make lemons. It is not the philosophy (although that is significant) but the ability to transmit these techniques from the teacher to the student that is paramount.

Both Linklater and Bogart are master teachers and successful in making their beliefs have import. That doesn't mean that the people they have taught are also capable of transmitting this precious information. Therefore, this incessant trashing of Lee Strasberg in order to justify newer thinking has little meaning. We have all seen despicable, narcissistic performances by so-called Actors Studio actors. Strasberg also influenced as many great American actors as any other theatrical philosopher, perhaps more. But we've also seen mixed results from other ways of working: heady, disassociated performances from Viewpoint actors; impersonal, techni-

cal performances from the British school; Suzuki actors racing across the stage in the squat position. It's not entirely about techniques, because we've seen them all go wrong or be miraculous at given times.

The truth is that to be complete, actors need training that fuses the Bogart and Linklater beliefs (with some others). You need stamina, you are required to be brave, to speak, to imagine, to move with suppleness and strength. All of these are skills, ways of working, crucial. How these are applied to make an actor is something less well defined. For all of our talk about developing the actor, it is the director today who often is the star of the show—we leave the theatre humming the success of the person who conceived it. When we give that responsibility—the responsibility to move the play—back to the actor rather than the director alone, we will again see great American stage actors.

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SIGNALING FROM SOMEWHERE

It's unfortunate that the joint interview between Anne Bogart and Kristin Linklater didn't provide anything approaching the fireworks of their exchanges previously aired in *American Theatre*. It

might have sparked a more spirited defense on Bogart's part of the much-maligned and often misrepresented training methods of Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki. As it appeared, Bogart merely relegated Suzuki's training to the function of "barre exercises" for her own version of the Viewpoints training. In the process she made some very misleading remarks about Suzuki's method that require clarification.

Suzuki's work as a director is the embodiment of the revolutionary theories of Antonin Artaud, who called for restoring to the theatre its spiritual and mystical significance by relegating language and psychology to more limited roles in the vastly under-used theatrical vocabulary of modern practice. As one of the true iconoclasts of the contemporary theatre, Suzuki adheres to Artaud's belief in developing actors who are not merely "recording organisms" but "like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames." Few American

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AMERICAN THEATRE CHATSONLINE

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

This month, TCG brings you the first of many online chats with theatre artists and cultural leaders.

Look for the schedule of events in TCG Live at www.tcg.org, or in *American Theatre*.

Transcripts of recent events will be posted online.

IN MARCH:



Chat with ERIC BOOTH about Arts in Education

Monday, March 12—
4:30-6:30 pm EST

Eric Booth leads the arts-in-education program at the Juilliard School and has taught at Stanford, NYU, Lincoln Center Institute and the Kennedy Center. His most recent book is *The Everyday Work of Art*. He has also performed in numerous plays on Broadway.



A Conversation with Actress KATHLEEN CHALFANT

Monday, March 26—
8:00 pm EST

Star of the critically acclaimed Off-Broadway production *Wit*, Chalfant is also known for her Tony-nominated performance as Hannah Pitt in the Broadway production of *Angels in America* among others.

NEXT MONTH:

Donald Margulies

Monday, April 2—7:00-8:30 pm EST

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actor-training programs (or actors, for that matter) are willing to go in for that degree of self-immolation.

So Bogart has coupled Suzuki's training with her own more benign method, which, for all its intense physicality, seems designed to create actors who are signaling to us from the slippery slopes of cyberspace—not quite the same thing. One wonders what real use she has for Suzuki's method, especially when she invokes the misleading notion of the training being about "the actor and God," a phrase she must know sends secular humanists in the theatre rushing for the exits. In my 10 years of working directly with Suzuki, I never heard the word "God" mentioned once. I did, however, hear the name Stanislavsky mentioned regularly, and have found in subsequent study a real value in Suzuki's training for restoring the vitality of Stanislavsky's original theories that has been sapped by the American method-acting systems.

Linklater, a champion of the school of the spoken word and the system of psychological realism that goes with it, is, perhaps understandably, obsessed with the idea that unsuspecting students are bowing before foreign gods of actor training. But she has stubbornly refused to see anything more in Suzuki's training than counterproductive external muscular training, which is interesting since one of its primary values is in the area of helping actors to experience language on a heightened level. Bogart, on the other hand, after an initial flurry of accusations of xenophobia against Linklater, seems ill-suited or simply unwilling to be a more precise advocate for this unique training method.

*Eric Hill
Stockbridge, Mass.*

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

I graduated from Columbia University's acting program in May 2000, a student of both Kristin Linklater and Anne Bogart (not to mention Andrei Serban, Robert Woodruff and two talented and rarely mentioned artists and

teachers, Nikolaus Wolcz and Ursula Wolcz). It was a blessing to be exposed to the radically different teachings of Linklater and Bogart. At the same time, neither one of them has all the answers. What a boring world it would be if they did (no offense, madames). Both Linklater's and Bogart's techniques have helped me, sometimes separately, sometimes at the same time. How can that be? Well, it can. The voices of other great teachers have also spoken to me in times of need, and will continue to do so.

*Joan Jubett
New York City*

DRAMATURGICAL REALITIES

I found many of the comments in "You Can't Tell a Dramaturg by Her Title" (Jan. '01) interesting and their perspectives varied—as I would expect them to be. And I doubt that there ▶

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