

MICHA NEWS

2008-09

A publication of The Michael Chekhov Association



From the President, Joanna Merlin

Greetings Dear Colleagues,

I have just returned from Moscow, where the Russians have rediscovered Michael Chekhov and are celebrating his life and work. I had never been to Russia, where my parents were born, and the Russians welcomed me to my "Historic Homeland" in a way that I could not have imagined. Jessica Cerullo, our Managing Director, was my companion, and she has written an article detailing the trip, which was truly memorable.

While there, I taught a group of Russian students at the Shukin School. They were very shy at first (understandable, given the 100 observers and a video camera filming the class). The students were huddled in a corner of the large studio, and were unable or unwilling to move their bodies in the first exercise. They didn't move into the larger space and couldn't respond to the suggestion of "enlarge". However, as we moved through contracting and expanding, they gradually started to unfold their bodies more and more fully and by the time we worked through a group of psychological gestures, they began to get excited with the sensations they were experiencing. Some of the students from the audience asked if they could join the class.

One student commented, "When I am asked to recall, and try to feel something, I am frustrated because I don't feel ANYTHING. But when I move my body, I FEEL something!" It was a new experience for them to use their bodies in this way. (Many of you will remember Michael Chekhov's quote, "You cannot command yourself to love or hate, but you can always make a gesture.") As we know, having worked in the technique, when the gesture is not made mechanically, but experienced in the body, a sensation results which leads to feeling. As Lenard Petit says, "It MOVES us and it moves the audience."

Toward the end of class, I asked the students to choose a line from an Anton Chekhov play and find a word that inter-

ested them and create a gesture for the word. With a little side coaching, some of the gestures were beautiful, original and the students found sounds through the movement that entered the line in a powerful way. It was a gratifying experience for me, and another confirmation that the Chekhov technique works universally, without respect to previous training, country, or culture.

MICHA is entering its tenth year! We look back to the beginning, when we were excited to have a small group of actors, teachers and directors in the Michael Chekhov work at an annual International Workshop. Each year, the feeling of discovery, joy, and community grew and renewed, and more participants joined MICHA. The number of workshops grew, we published DVDs of our Master Classes, presented a film, and, in 2009, an academic journal will be available in the summer to commemorate our tenth anniversary. Michael Chekhov lives on!

On a sad, personal note, Mala Powers' home in Sylmar, California, burned to the ground in the recent California wildfire. Kim Barrett, who took over the executrix position of the Michael Chekhov estate after Mala died, and who was living in Mala's home, was evacuated. She managed to remove the Michael Chekhov records and memoirabilia, and is doing her best to cope with the situation. We send our love and thoughts to Kim at this difficult time.

On an economic level, these are hard times for everyone. However, we are looking forward to the new administration with hope and optimism. Obama will be good for America, the world, and the arts!

Lots of love,
Joanna Merlin



MICHA President

The Year Ahead

Dear Friends,

You will read a lot in our newsletter this year detailing events that reach into the rich past that is an inherent part of Michael Chekhov and his technique. Joanna and my recent trip to Russia as well as MICHA participant, Lyudmilla Kizer's, memories of her university studies in Moscow are reminders of the unique tradition out of which our organization has grown. As we look toward our 10th International Workshop and Festival, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of our workshop participants who have helped to shape who we are and what we do.

In 2003, Marjolein Baars hosted our workshop in Amsterdam and introduced open space sessions into our schedule to promote a dialogue about the technique and the myriad of ways we interact with it. This tradition of open space has continued with the influence of other MICHA faculty and workshop participants. Last summer, at the workshop in Toronto, detailed notes were taken and in the winter a core group of MICHA faculty met to contemplate all that has been offered in the last decade and to dream collectively about our future.

As the unknown awaits us we ask that you consider joining MICHA formally by becoming a Friend of MICHA and contributing annual dues. (Details can be found on page 10 or at our website michaelchekhov.org/join.htm.) We look forward to seeing you at a future workshop or event.

Best wishes,
Jessica Cerullo



Managing Director



Honoring an Émigré, Michael Chekhov in Moscow

By Jessica Cerullo

When Michael Chekhov chose to leave his homeland in 1928 it was a decision influenced by a Stalinist Russia that would not tolerate his artistic vision. With a resolution for his arrest on the horizon a high-ranking member of the Communist Party (who one imagines was also a fan) arranged passports for Chekhov and his wife, Xenia to go on a 'vacation'. 36 hours later, they left Russia never to return. Instead they made their home in a variety of countries eventually settling in Beverly Hills, California.

The decision to emigrate is one that many talented Russians made. Four years ago, with the assistance of Nobel Prize Laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Library Fund-Russia Abroad opened to the public with the unique mission to house the memoirs and documented works of Russian émigrés. Solzhenitsyn, whose writings about the Gulags got the attention of his country and resulted in his exile in 1974, made a home in Vermont and returned to Russia in 1994. When he died in August the House was renamed in his memory and continues to insure that the Russian émigrés who made significant contributions to scientific and cultural life are honored. This fall the organization chose to honor the memory and legacy of Michael Chekhov and in conjunction produced a documentary titled, *Marilyn Monroe, Anthony Quinn and others: the star system of Michael Chekhov* and bestowed a medal of honor for outstanding progress in cinema and dramatic art on three artists whose work has continued Chekhov's legacy. Among the honorees was MICHA's president, Joanna Merlin; actor, producer and film director Nikita Mikhalkov; and actor, director and writer Sergei Yerskiy. At the award ceremony Russia Abroad screened our film, *Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn*, thereby giving the film its international premiere.

At the height of his success in Russia, Chekhov was performing at the Moscow Art Theater and the First Studio. He was, by modern standards, a star. A particularly favorite story that I have heard told many times is that upon leaving the theater one night his fans chased af-

ter his horse and carriage showering him with compliments and shouting, "Tell us what you believe in!" Unfortunately, it was his beliefs and artistic expression that would remove him from Russian history books. His name became one of the many that remained unspoken. In an address at a Michael Chekhov symposium in Paris last year I listened as Russian director, Anatoly Vasiliev himself an emigre living now in France, recalled his student years when Chekhov's book was secretly lent to him for study. Nearly 50 years later, Joanna and I sat in the theater in Moscow and witnessed a public embracing of the man who was her teacher. Not only the Russian theatrical community but also the general public listened and applauded the work and memory of a once forbidden artist. The documentary that was produced is scheduled to air this winter on RTR-Planeta and the attendees of the Russia Abroad events included government officials and other professionals, some of who were learning about Michael Chekhov for the first time. While visiting our colleague Anatoly Smeliansky at the Moscow Art Theater, we learned that another separate, and more extensive, documentary about Chekhov is in pre-production and will shoot in the United States this winter. To our delight Chekhov is experiencing a renaissance in his homeland.

Needless to say, Joanna and I were uncommon tourists in Moscow. We cruised past Red Square to experience the everyday city of her teacher. Marina Ivanova, a professor in Russian theater history at the Shukin School and a Michael Chekhov scholar, planned each moment of our tour where we not only visited the Moscow Art Theater and sat in Chekhov's dressing room at the former First Studio, but we also visited the location of the apartments where he lived and stood in the Church of the Arch Angel Gabriel where he married his second wife, Xenia. Our final visit of the day was to the apartment of Vsevolod Meyerhold. Here we were reminded of the fate of an artist who did not emigrate and instead suffered censorship, imprisonment and execution.



Joanna Merlin and Academy Award winning director, Nikita Mikhalkov were presented with the Michael Chekhov award in Moscow this November.

The following day when Joanna and Marina participated in a panel discussion about Chekhov's life and work, it was remarkable to see every seat in the audience occupied. Actors from many of the theaters came to listen and ask questions. Equally engaged were the students of Vakhtangov's Shukin school where Joanna taught a master class to 16 students. 100 others observed as she taught the fundamentals of psychological gesture. Everywhere we went, we were surrounded by the respect Chekhov inspired. Passed down from actor to actor and teacher to student, Joanna was the recipient of this outpouring which the festival director Sergei Zaytsev described using a Russian proverb. "Where you are born is where you are needed," he wrote in the festival program. "Life affirms this folk wisdom, for a person is inseparable from the place he is born and can be entirely happy only in his Motherland. The great legacy of emigration is returning and gradually we are coming to understand that we have one Motherland, i.e. one memory and a common future." Had Chekhov lived as long as Solzhenitsyn perhaps he, too, would have returned to the land of his birth. During his life this was never a possibility but with the assistance of his pupil, 53 years after his death, Chekhov's work continues to serve a country that needs him.

Strung Upon an Image

By Nick Gabriel

On the first day of MICHA's Workshop, the participants and faculty gathered in Ryerson University's black box theater where we were asked to choose our primary teacher(s) for the ten days of instruction. The overall theme of the workshop was that of incorporation. Each teacher (or pair of teachers) then described a pedagogical theme or principle of the technique they wanted to investigate in a series of morning classes. Sarah Kane would explore speech and the Chekhov work, Ragnar Freidank would explore individual interests and the on camera relationship, Marjolein Baars and Jessica Cerullo explored the creative process and how our individuality meets a prescribed text, and Joanna Merlin, Fern Sloan and Anne Gottlieb addressed the basic principles of Chekhov's technique for those encountering the work for the first time. Most of the work, directly involved the study, analysis, and exploration of Bertolt Brecht's play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

My primary instructors at the workshop were Marjolein Baars and Jessica Cerullo. In the pursuit of what Chekhov referred to as our 'creative individuality', we examined five realities which included the world of the play, our professional identity, personal identity, society, and the creative process. Out of our individual 'creative individualities' we found an ensemble approach to the play.

The world of the play referred to Brecht's text and the images that emerged from it. Professional identity referred to the various ways we identified ourselves as professionals (e.g. artists, directors, actors, educators, etc.). Personal identity referred to any information about ourselves that we were willing to share, often having to do with cultural influences. Society referred to social, political, and geographical groups, large and small, that influence our behavior and perceptions. The creative process referred to our unique and varied approaches to creating theatre.

Every day before class, and sometimes during class, Marjolein or Jessica would have us write



This is my class surrounded by posted notes documenting our observations throughout the week.

down observations, sources of inspiration, and images (including artwork) that seemed somehow pertinent to the week's exploration. Marjolein established early on that these notes, written on sheets of little, yellow sticky-paper, were specifically for the members of our class to share with one another. Although discussion about the process with other workshop participants was encouraged, we were asked to be sensitive to the personal nature of the notes we took.

Each of the Five Realities was written on the blackboard. Every day the notes were organized based upon which of the Five Realities they seemed to exemplify. New notes were constantly posted and some of the existing notes were rearranged.

By the end of the workshop, there were hundreds of notes posted in corresponding categories. This display, a work of art in its own right, made up entirely of individual observations, served as a beautiful point of reference for the collective journey of my class and framed the gateway into the collaborative exploration of Brecht's play.

At our first class Marjolein asked us to interview one another about why we were attending the

workshop and what we hoped to get out of it. We were a small group so the process of asking questions, responding honestly, and sharing observations didn't take much time, but I was struck by the diversity of our responses to these questions and the particular objectives that piqued each participant's interest. For instance, one participant suggested that he wanted to "find himself" in the Chekhov technique, he was seeking "ah-ha" moments. Another participant, a teacher, asked how she might share her knowledge of the Chekhov technique in the most effective way possible. Another participant asked how she could "step into the unknown with abandon." After each of us, including Marjolein and Jessica, identified some inquiries and pertinent objectives, we verbally refined them, then embodied them in gesture. Each subsequent morning, we began class with that same gestures and then created a second, different, gesture that reflected a new inquiry or objective particular to that morning's work.

With our individual gestures defined we set about exploring how we would tell the entire story of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. We worked to accomplish this with minimal verbal action, a bit of improvised singing, and many, many

images from the play represented physically. To begin, Jessica created a playing area articulated by a length of red yarn strung across the floor in the shape of a rectangle. We were instructed to invite images from the play that we found to be particularly compelling and to make manifest those images within the playing space defined by the parameters of the yarn.

Another exercise that was especially amusing to me was one in which Marjolein had us sing in groups of three from the points of view of specific characters in the play. We improvised in various stylistic genres including Opera, Operetta, and Country Western. On its own, this improvisation was compelling because of what it revealed about each character's attitude toward significant plot points, but it gave rise to an even more interesting exercise toward the end of our two-week collaboration. Marjolein and Jessica had the class create a soundscape of images from the play. The emphasis of this exploration was on singing and rhythm, but there were some contributions which were completely atonal and served to evoke specific environmental surroundings. I was surprised to discover that the atmosphere we created in this effort was as illuminating as any of the physical images we'd created earlier in the week.

On the final morning of the workshop we performed the entire arc of Brecht's play. A combination of sound, song, text, gesture and movement, our Caucasian Chalk Circle was rich with authentic self-expression, courageous aesthetic interpretation and a generous collaborative and improvisatory effort. My classmates were supportive of one another in every endeavor, no matter how personally or artistically challenging.

In the afternoons our morning group dispersed and we selected new teachers and new groups. I worked with Joanna, Sarah, Ragnar, and for the first time, Fern Sloan. Joanna taught an auditioning workshop, Sarah taught a class examining the relationship between



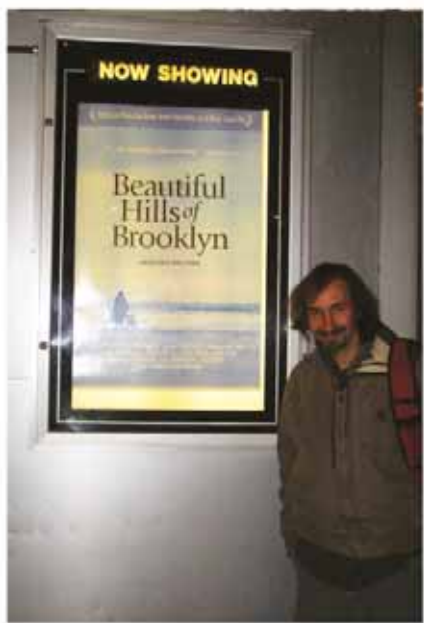
A clown workshop was just one of the events offered in the evening session.

verbal action and various Chekhovian principles, Ragnar offered an open class that incorporated being on camera, and Fern miraculously incorporated the essential principles of the Chekhov technique into a single afternoon session.

The evening sessions offered a variety of topics. Small group discussions and classes initiated by the participants and attended by both faculty and students took place. On one evening Marjolein taught a clown workshop and on another we screened *Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn*, a short film directed by Ragnar and starring Joanna. Watching this film reinforced my commitment to the MICHA philosophy of training a new generation of practitioners that will incorporate Chekhov's psycho-physical approach into their acting technique. *Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn* is an enduring and exemplary little work of art that was produced on a shoestring budget, with a novice film director and a principal cast of one. Joanna and Ragnar demonstrated their individual artistic mastery and the film served to reinforce their status as meritorious experts in the Chekhov technique. As ambassadors for MICHA, they admirably represented the kind of work the organization aspires to encourage.

In an era where self-producing and non-commercial work is increasingly challenging, I was taken in by the notion that financial resources are secondary to creative ones. A length of red string and a few willing actors were all that was needed to inspire a week of truly generous collaboration.

Nick Gabriel is a 3rd year MFA candidate at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, California. He received MICHA's certificate of completion at the International Workshop in Toronto.



Blank Page and Happy Accidents

Jonathan Phillips talks to director Ragnar Freidank about making the award winning short film **"Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn"**

Blank paper, sharpened pencil, and the sound of words being written on a page as thoughts are transferred and experiences are conveyed. From the opening sounds and images of the new film *Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn*, the audience is asked to take a slower pace and follow the thoughts of Jessie Singer Sylvester, an elderly woman living on a pension, confronting the changes in her life and her beloved Brooklyn neighborhood. The film moves effortlessly from present time to reverie and is told entirely in the words of the diary, interwoven with the Walt Whitman poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." The rhapsodic poetry, which speaks of generations reaching out to one another across the boundaries of time, vibrates against the simple diction of the diary, illuminating a small but important life.

One point that may strike the audience about the film is the simple waiting that takes place. There is no rush to tell, explain, or teach. Like so much in life, it unfolds before us only one moment at a time. We can never race forward any faster than time allows. We are told a simple story and watch as Jessie ages, changes, and faces those challenges that arise.

Joanna Merlin stars as Jessie in the screen adaptation of Ellen Cassedy's award-winning one-woman play. This is the first film presented by the Michael Chekhov Association and follows the 3-DVD Set of *Master Classes in the Michael Chekhov Technique*. The film was written by Joanna Merlin and Ragnar Freidank, and is directed by Ragnar. I spoke with the first-time film director this fall.

JP: There is an overreaching sense in the film of what Chekhov calls the Four Brothers: Ease, Form, Beauty, and Entirety. No effort seems wasted, no expression overstated, no overlooking of the obvious. How do you think this was accomplished?

RF: Everyone working on this film was a master

of their task. They were all top in their field and were generous with their skill and knowledge, never placing their expertise above the film, never standing in the way or withholding.

JP: Joanna is wonderful in the film. Her performance is a real transformation. What was it like working with her?

RF: It was absolutely wonderful and I don't know how to describe it. Maybe the most accurate way to say it is that Joanna and I had a language between us that we both understood. A language of words, images and questions. Sometimes fragile, sometimes funny; it is like giving and receiving. Like having a really good conversation.

JP: Did you and Joanna discuss various techniques or acting exercises before filming?

RF: Since we were shooting out of order, prior to setting up the scene, Eddie [Marritz, the cinematographer], Joanna and I would be on the set and I would describe the situation -- what was going on at that time in the script. I asked Joanna what Jessie (the character) would do and where she would go. Joanna would move and live in the space and Eddie and I followed her. That's how we found the actual set-up for each particular scene.

JP: How was it to direct your first film?

RF: I didn't really grow up on with television but more with books and stories. In my acting training in Germany, there were a lot of prejudices against film and television. The consensus was that real art is happening only in the theater.

I don't think that is true at all. I find that film is an exciting and very dream-like medium. As you are working on editing, images seemingly come to you out of nowhere and relate to the image on the screen right in front of you and so you begin to construct a storyline. The

Premiered at the
Russia Abroad Film Festival
Moscow November 7, 2008

Awarded
Best Short Film at the
Big Apple Film Festival, New York
November 22, 2008

Coming the
Beverly Hills High-Def
Film Festival
January 2009

Coming to the
Connecticut Film Festival 2009



NYC Premier, November 2008



Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn serves as an evocative spark for discussion in educational, conference and community settings. The film provides an inspiring example of the Michael Chekhov technique in the hands of a master practitioner. It's appealing to audiences of all ages.

Create a moving, thought-provoking program by bringing the film's collaborators to your screening of this intimate and powerful piece.

For more information about arranging a screening of "Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn," at your campus or other setting, contact:

info@beautifulhillsofbrooklyn.com

same was true in writing the screenplay. Joanna and I would sit in her kitchen. While she spoke Jessie's words, images would come to me. I would describe them to Joanna and we would dream around with them, write them down, and eventually it became a script. For me, one of the beauties of film is that it is not so fleeting as theater. A film remains. You can take it out of the box, look at it and share it.

JP: How would you describe the role of the film director?

RF: I felt responsible for holding the atmosphere for the film. While many people have to run around, hang lights, move walls, I felt I needed to stay with the feel of the film, to hold the film. Eventually someone would ask me: "this way or that way?" and if I didn't have contact with Jessie's imaginary world, how would I know which was the right thing to do?

There was really a little bit of magic happening in doing this film. It was as if the film began to interact with all of us; it let us find things. It is like there is a wish or a shape to the film in the imaginary, and when that wish meets reality there is a little dance. If I didn't have a wish, I would be overwhelmed with the reality, but because there is something that I am holding inside, there is a moment where there is this surge of joy and you go: "This is going to be great."



Fantastic Realism and the Friendship of Vakhtangov and Chekhov

by Lyudmilla Kizer

As an actress and acting instructor in my work I combine the two approaches of Yevgeny Vakhtangov and Michael Chekhov. When I was a student at the Vakhtangov Theatrical School in Russia, I had an opportunity to study Vakhtangov's approach to acting with his former pupils.¹ What they taught and the way they taught will always guide me. I am also grateful for the memories they shared with us about Chekhov.

I first became fascinated with Chekhov's talent after reading a book about him, written by one of his pupils, V. Gromov.² As a freshman at the Vakhtangov Theatrical School, I was especially interested in the friendship Vakhtangov and Chekhov developed. In Gromov's book I read Chekhov's words, "Vakhtangov combined in his art all the best that Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko had. Each of Vakhtangov's productions was a harmonious blend of the very beautiful, very deep, very light, very mathematically clever, and humanly true."³ I knew that Chekhov was younger than Vakhtangov and considered himself Vakhtangov's pupil and that Chekhov created most of his unique characters in Vakhtangov's shows or with Vakhtangov's help. I remember the admiration with which my master, Vera Lvova, or the magnificent Tsesiliya Mansurova spoke about Chekhov's acting. Being himself a unique talent, he developed Vakhtangov's ideas, changing them according to his experience as an actor, adding new tools, terms, and various games of imagination.

On coming to America I wanted to study M. Chekhov's technique. It was possible because Chekhov's former students continued spreading and developing his ideas. I felt that in a way they were spreading Vakhtangov's heritage too.

The foundation of both Vakhtangov's and Chekhov's approaches to the profession of act-

ing were the same: the belief that artists must develop themselves spiritually and intellectually, they must have highly developed ethics and aesthetics as well as discipline. Such artists would understand that only through self-perfection, through developing their minds and souls, through growing their compassion and empathy as human beings, could they become genuine artists. They would understand that an actor would not be able to hide his impoverished soul and that his work on stage would reveal it. Vakhtangov and Chekhov were pupils of Stanislavsky and Sulerzitsky who taught them the necessity for the actor to develop his soul to become an artist.⁴ In the USA Chekhov continued teaching his students in the same way, further enriching their creative individualities. One's creative individuality would always ask, "For the sake of *what* am I going on stage?" and would always feel the responsibility for the outcome. The actor who asks this will continue to improve his acting technique as well as confirm his understanding that there is no technique that can make him an artist. Rather, it is up to him to become an artist.

The creative individuality of an actor is the cornerstone of Vakhtangov's idea of Fantastic Realism. Vakhtangov called his art Fantastic Realism because the actor, in addition to creating a truthful inner life of a character, had to fantasize the outer form of his role, creating it according to the style of the show. Thus Fantastic Realism comes from the artist's fantasy and imagination. Chekhov, as an actor with an exceptional ability to fantasize, coupled with his tremendous imagination, shared Vakhtangov's concept of such realism, and said "Any fantastic character, situation, or psychology can be real. The Witch, Ivan-Tsarevich, the Serpent with Twelve Heads from Russian fairytales or archangels in the interlude of Goethe's *Faust* can be truthful and real on stage, but they do not fall under the definition of natural."⁵

I teach my students the aspects of Vakhtangov's Fantastic Realism as it was taught to me. The first important principle is that every theatrical idea requires its own expressive form, and thus every play of every author requires its own theatrical realization. The form of the show should be connected to that specific play. Secondly, the expressive form of the show should reflect a contemporary attitude to the material of the play. Thirdly, the form of each show should be organic for this specific theatre, this group of artists and in turn will manifest its artistic individuality. "Thus," actor, director and scholar Boris Zakhava writes "three factors, in his (Vakhtangov's) opinion, define the form of the show: the author, the present, and the theatrical collective. In this way, Fantastic Realism requires that the actor not only lives the character's life with genuine feelings and thoughts, but also creates the character based on the actor's attitude in relation to him. The actor-artist looks for the expressive means that would most fully and most precisely reveal the essence of his idea. The artist uses those expressive means to define the form of the artist's work. It means that the actor must develop not only the scenic feeling of truth but also the feeling of form."⁶

Through the relationship with the character the actor brings himself to a genuine theatricality. This became for both Vakhtangov and Chekhov, the highest truth of the Theatre. With Fantastic Realism, Pavel Markov, Russian theater historian and critic writes, "Vakhtangov created the justification for the Theater and destroyed its contradictions....The actor was affirmed as the creative basis of the show; he played simultaneously the character and his attitude to the character. The freedom of artistic subjectivism and the assertion of the actor's personal interpretation of the character in accordance with his emotional and spiritual feelings became the actor's rights."⁷ Thus the idea of two consciousnesses (or duality of

the actor's consciousness) would be laid as the foundation of both Vakhtangov's and Chekhov's approaches to acting.

In connection with the duality of the actor's consciousness, Vakhtangov and Chekhov shared the thought that an actor experiences only two feelings, the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. He is either pleased or displeased with how he performs, and he can't experience anything else. The other emotions belonged to the character an actor performed. According to my belief in Vakhtangov and Chekhov's understanding of emotions on stage and to my personal experience as an actress I feel a personal responsibility to teach young actors about the duality of the actor's consciousness, and to distinguish between the emotions which their characters experience and their own emotions as actors. I hope it will help them to be more imaginative and will spare them unnecessary emotional pain.

As a young actress I responded to Vakhtangov's Fantastic Realism in my own way. I knew that my fellow actors and I would need to discover a new, theatrical, planet with its own laws of nature; with the help of our imagination and attitude to this world we would need to *justify* each small or big action as well as the feelings of our character. The Russian word for justification is *opravdaniie*, from the word *pravda* which means truth. The main tool for such justification lies in the imagination. Justification found or discovered with the help of imagination and fantasy would be a main tool of Vakhtangov's "Fantastic Realism", and would be applied by Chekhov and adopted for his method. Chekhov developed a technique whereby actors could justify their characters' lives on stage in different genres and styles. He digested Vakhtangov's ideas and created his own tools: Psychological Gesture, Atmosphere, Centers, Images, etc. In my teaching I use all these tools, not only for developing the actor's abilities but also to help justify a character's life on stage. On a "new planet" that actors and a director create on stage the center of a character can be destroyed if the beloved says, "I do not love you", and the same center can instantly become a ball of joyful energy

if the same beloved says "I was only joking. I do love you". On such a planet the atmosphere can be heavy and dark, and a character would not be able to move, yet in no time it can transform into a weightless green light with flowers of many colors. On such a planet a character's soul embrace the beloved even if he is ten yards away. Students feel the artistry of such justification and the freedom of exploring new possibilities. I feel indescribable satisfaction when I see their imagination take flight and carry them beyond their intellectual approach as they find striking and unusual, but at the same time organic, outer forms and fill them with genuine emotions. With the use of their imagination they feel the playfulness of their profession and experience immense joy.

I believe in Vakhtangov/Chekhov's notion that Theatre is a Cathedral of a Great Art, in which the actor has to leave behind all his ordinary worries before crossing the threshold. Chekhov suggested that before going on stage an actor should do some exercises on finding and radiating an energy of joy, and with that permeating energy, step over the threshold into the creative place. In my classes I alternate such games with etudes aimed at building an atmosphere of creativity in the way that Vakhtangov played with his students. The actor's feeling of celebration of being on stage is one that I share with my students. I was taught this in my own theatrical school, and it has been reinforced while attending MICHA workshops on M. Chekhov's technique. It is an amazing feeling to see how contemporary theatre artists continue developing and enriching Chekhov's and thus Vakhtangov's ideas. I hope that my students will do the same. Neither Vakhtangov nor Chekhov believed that their discoveries were the last discoveries in Theatre. They looked forward to a Theater of the Future that would take interesting, unpredictable, and artistic paths. Nevertheless they believed that genuine Theatre would always combine a truthful inner life with the outer theatrical form created by the rich director/actors' artistic individualities. They strove to perfect themselves as artists and to, in turn, perfect the Theatre. In this way they brought the audience the idea that art could make this world a better place

and that art could bring nobility to human souls and thus to human lives.

I am convinced that those who follow Chekhov's acting technique also follow Vakhtangov, a great master who insistently asked his students, "For the sake of what do you develop your acting skills? For the sake of what do you go to every rehearsal? For the sake of what are you stepping on stage? For the sake of what do you want to be an artist?"

Notes

1. I was taught by Vakhtangov's pupils Vera Lvova, Boris Zakhava, and Mariya Sinelnikova. I am grateful to fate for the opportunity to have conversations with Tsesiliya Mansurova, the First Turandot of the renowned Vakhtangov's show The Princess Turandot. All of them became prominent masters of Vakhtangov Theatre and thus Russian theatre as a whole.
2. V.Gromov. Mikhail Chekhov. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1970).
3. V.Gromov. Mikhail Chekhov. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1970) p. 21. All the translations of quotes in this article are mine.
4. Leopold Sulerzitsky was asked by K. Stanislavsky to head the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. He was the director of the Studio until his death in 1916.
5. Mikhael Chekhov, *Literaturnoie nasledie*, vol.1, (Moskva: Isskustvo, 1995) p.157.
6. Boris Zakhava, *Sovremenniki* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1969) p. 246.
7. Pavel Markov, *O teatre*, vol.1 (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1974) p. 84.

MASTER CLASSES IN THE MICHAEL CHEKHOV TECHNIQUE

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Faculty: Scott Fielding, Joanna Merlin, Fern Sloan, Mel Shrawder.

One Day Workshop Series, CAP 21, New York City

Erik Andrews, Katherine Argo, Steven Bosch, Sal Cacciato, Tania Chelnov-Snitow, Roberto Colosimo, Maia DeSanti, Don DiPaolo, Tim Fannon, Elaine Faye, Jennifer Fisher, Peter Frechette, Tyree Giroux, Tara Gordon, Karolyn Gould, Jane Guyer, Thomas J Kane, Kate Kennedy, John Kinshurf, Polina Klimovitskaya, Hope Lambert, Gail Langstroth, James Lewis, Timothy Lewis, James Luse, Marianne Malitz, Crystal Manich, Conan McCarty, Mary Molluso, Chris O'Connor, Nellie Perera, Deborah Ramirez, Glynis Rigsby, James Schlatter, Jake Sher, Mel Shrawder, Emmett Smith, Moussa Sourgou, Irina Viscun, Lisa Weitzman, Meghan Whitney, Doug Wilder, Susan Willerman, Jamie Winnick. **Faculty: Sarah Kane, Ted Pugh, Joanna Merlin, Fern Sloan.**



June Intensive at New York University

Eric Achacoso, Beth Adler, Katherine Argo, Leslie Bennett, Lisa Betz, Sal Cacciato, John Capalbo, Bethany Caputo, Maia DeSanti, Anjalee Deshpande-Nadkarni, Don DiPaolo, Tim Fannon, Mayra Gallardo, Megan Gleeson, Lynne Griffin, Victoria Hale, Alex Hill, Jancie Orlandi, Laura Regan, Jake Sher, Sean Sullivan, Sibel Tilav, Tom Vasiliades, Betsy White, Susan Willerman. **Faculty: Jessica Cerullo, Anne Gottlieb, Joanna Merlin, Lenard Petit.**

International Workshop and Festival Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada

Kalthoom Amin, Martin Anderson, Erik Andrews, Carlos Antunes, Cynthia Ashperger, Kathleen Baum, Julia Beers, Leslie Bennett, Patricia Boyette, Valerie Brunetto, Scott Burrell, Michela Cannon, Bethany Caputo, Brent Carver, Paul Christman, Maria Cominis, Ruthel Darvas, Sheldon Deckelbaum, Michael DeRose, Julie Douglas, Gretchen Egolf, Shelly Elman, Jeff Erbach, Sochi Fried, Nick Gabriel, Brianna Gare, Meg Gennings, Katerina Georgieva, Tyree Giroux, Andrea Grapko, Lynne Griffin, Juan Gutierrez, Nick Hamilton, Lavinia Hart, David Haugen, Taryn Jorgenson, Deborah Keller, Jimmy King, Sandra Krstin, Matilda Leyser, James Luse, Bryde MacLean, Geordie MacMinn, Tina Manchise, Crystal Manich, Craig Mathers, Conan McCarty, Scott McCulloch, Adam McLean, Guy William Molnar, Janet Morrison, Sarah Nedwek, Jesse Nerenberg, Sandra Nicholls, Louise Nolan, Cathy O'Dell, Jancie Orlandi, Irene Pauzer, Christopher Petit, Jonathan Phillips, Verane Pick, Rena Polley, Maria Prado, Janet Raskin, Deborah Robertson, Andrew Robinson, Michael Rubinstein, Marc Shaw, Jack Shea, Jake Sher, Liz Shipman, Glen Sparer, Haluk Tatlidil, Peter Tedeschi, Stephanie Thompson, Lesley Ann Timlick, Tom Vasiliades, Rosanna Vitale, Lionel Walsh, Lisa Weitzman, Betsy White, Danielle Wilson, Jamie Winnick. **Faculty: Marjolein Baars, Jessica Cerullo, Anne Gottlieb, Ragnar Freidank, Sarah Kane, Joanna Merlin, Fern Sloan.**

MICHA NEWS

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2009 MICHA EVENTS

Teacher's Workshop

January 2-6, at California State University,
Long Beach, California
Faculty: Dawn Arnold, Ragnar Freidank, Joanna Merlin
\$625/\$600

Image and The Imaginary Body

January 18, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Faculty: Cathy Albers
\$150/\$135

Letting the Character Speak: Using Chekhov's Technique to Create Text

March 7, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. at
CAP 21 in New York City
Faculty: Jessica Cerullo \$150/ \$135

Auditioning and the Michael Chekhov Technique

May 17, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. at
CAP 21 in New York City
Faculty: Lenard Petit
\$150/\$135

June Intensive

June 5-7, at New York University
Faculty TBA
\$350/\$325

10th annual International Michael Chekhov Workshop and Festival

July 31 - August 8, at the Mason Gross School of the Arts
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