

Michael Chekhov

October 6, 1936

Lesson given after performance at Dartington of
Uday Shankar and his Company of Dancers and Musicians

INSPIRATION OF UDAY SHANKAR'S PERFORMANCE
THE FUTURE CULTURE - A HUMAN CULTURE
THE IMPORTANCE OF A TECHNIQUE
THE ACTOR'S MOVEMENTS MUST BE MUSICAL
STACCATO AND LEGATO MOVEMENTS

Uday Shankar

INSPIRATION OF UDAY SHANKAR'S PERFORMANCE:

We shall try to use this wonderful performance and make a lesson from such a rich experience as Mr. Shankar and his troupe have given us some hours ago. I would like you to concentrate on the experience and express in a few words what you would like to have from Mr. Shankar - for your future work in the theatre - for your future theatre art. Try to do this, not with your intellect, but with the same impulse which brought you here to this Studio. I don't think you came to the decision to study a theatre technique for three years through your intellect only. It is not possible. Your decision was made somewhere else in your soul, and it is to this point that I am speaking now. Try to find out what this mysterious point wishes to take from Mr. Shankar, his music, his movements - everything.

THE FUTURE CULTURE - A HUMAN CULTURE:

What would I wish to steal from Mr. Shankar? The first thing I would wish to steal from him: I would wish to

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have such a great culture, such a big, rich background which you can feel behind his work; behind each movement. But we are not Hindu people, and we don't belong to this big culture. Thousands and thousands of years are speaking through Shankar's work. What he has shown us is only what remains from this big culture. But we are English and American, and we come from different places in the world, and our culture is absolutely another one.

Mr. Shankar has a beautiful, majestic past, but we have a future. We have to create our future. We have to create our culture, and this new culture will not be a Russian culture or a French culture; it will be a human culture. Only this point is interesting. The history of each event in our life shows us that we are going to create a culture for everyone - for Shankar, too - a human culture.

My first wish, therefore, is that we create this future culture as far as we can, with the understanding that we are not working for ourselves personally and egotistically, but we are working to create a future culture which we may never see because it is so far away. But we must take this first step. That is how Mr. Shankar inspires me.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A TECHNIQUE:

The second thing I would wish to steal is this beautiful technique which Mr. Shankar has. Each point of his body is permeated with the feeling of what is necessary. Each

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movement is speaking about this big and important technique. If we try to compare our theatre at the present time, and we wish to be very honest, we must ask have we a technique? Not at all. Try to remember the best performance you have ever seen, and you will agree it was only dilettante. If the actor of today has a talent, we observe that this gifted person always tries to create a technique for himself, but he is always lying. Our really gifted actors and actresses are really alone, and no one appreciates their attempts to create a technique, although really gifted persons always try to do so.

So my second wish is to steal from Mr. Shankar this understanding that art must be based on technique. We, in our Studio, are going to have this technique and that is why I need a three-year course, because I have to teach you this technique. I shall give you a technique so that if I want something from you, I must be able to tell you why and for what aim. That is what I call a technique. I am going to give you many technical things. How you will apply this technical knowledge is your concern, or ability, or talent, but it is my business to give this technique to you.

THE ACTOR'S MOVEMENTS MUST BE MUSICAL:

The third thing I would like to steal from Mr. Shankar is music. He and his troupe are permeated with the music - the whole art is music. Each movement is music.

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They have to dance, they have to play on their instruments. We do not have to dance, and we can use music only here and there, but I am absolutely sure that we can have music in our bodies, just as they do. We don't have to dance, but we have to be full of music. That is why I am always suffering when I see an actor on the stage who has no idea about music but who moves and speaks as he does in everyday life.

In our lives today there is no music. We have music very seldom. For example, when a mother loves her child, if you look, you will see that she is an entirely different person when she is with the child. She can give you a cup of tea with music! We are not going to dance, but we must do things as dancers. We have to "swallow" music, as it were, and have it inside. It is, therefore, very important in everyday life to try to be aware from time to time whether we are moving, speaking, walking, and talking as artists. This is the first step to the feeling that we are artists and beings who have "eaten" and "drunk" some music.

STACCATO AND LEGATO MOVEMENTS:

Exercises:

In the staccato lunges, the feeling is like that of being a stone and having complete control of your movements. In the legato movements, everything is like flowing water, but still sending out all your force. Do not become tense physically because then all your power goes.

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The difference between acrobatics and our kind of movement is that acrobatics are purely for training the body, while our exercises in movement are for sending out the soul, the feelings, through the body.

Exercises in composing groups:

To music, two people take poses of their own and then take four steps toward each other, then hold for two beats and find two poses which compliment each other. Then groups of four repeat the same exercise.