

Michael Chekhov

(afternoon) June 28, 1937

REHEARSAL
 FEELING OF THE WHOLE
 STYLE
 ATMOSPHERE
 DEPTH, IDEA, AND RHYTHMICAL FORM OF THE PLAY
 LIGHTING, SPEECH, COSTUMES
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FEELING OF THE WHOLE:

Criticism: Rehearsal of The Golden Steed:

There was something wrong with all the points - atmosphere, rhythmical parts, characters, etc. This is as it must be, but if it is obvious what was wrong, then it can be cured. It was not groundless work, as for instance Carnival is still groundless. Groundless work requires one thing, and work which has ground requires another. First of all, that which is not quite clear to your cast is the feeling of the whole - this is not yet there. It is difficult to get and it requires time, but we have to get it.

In order to have the feeling of the whole it means that first of all each member of the cast must work apart from the rehearsals, and in their imaginations they must go through the whole play as if sitting in the audience room. In this way they will get the impression of being in the audience room during the performance. The directors will help their casts very much if they will remind them of the three parts which are always there - the beginning, the middle, and the end. Having these three parts is something which will give you the

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feeling of the whole. Without this frame you will stand as before an ocean; if it is to be an ocean which is rough, then it must have a beginning, a middle and an end. Each member of the cast must see the performance many, many times in his imagination, and gradually there will grow up in his actor's nature this feeling of the whole, and this will inspire him.

STYLE:

This is the second important point - you have not reached the style of the play. Sometimes a few figures have style, but only accidentally, and the whole performance has no style in movement, or in speech. How can we reach this style? First of all you must find this fairy tale, and let it move, and speak, and suggest some things which will grow as a style for the play. As it is, it is sometimes so naturalistic and earthy, and sometimes like a crowd on the street, which is absolutely out of the style of the fairy tale.

The audience will not be able to understand the idea of the play, because it is without style, and the style speaks about the idea. You must find this through your imagination, because all the settings, lighting, costumes, etc., require from the human being a style, and this is not yet there.

ATMOSPHERE:

The third important thing is that today there were no atmospheres. It was very cleverly and very actively done,

but it was without any atmosphere, and as a result all the voices were without feeling - feeling will not come if you are not in the atmosphere around you. You must spend some rehearsals working on the atmospheres, and not only radiating them, but speaking and moving out of atmosphere. It is worthwhile to work with the atmospheres which are so clear in this play.

DEPTH OF PLAY:

There is another thing which is of importance to all directors. Each play has some depth, and every actor must awaken the depth which belongs to this or that particular play. The actor must be more of an artist in loving this depth of a production. We know that it is necessary to meditate on what is going on in the audience when the curtain is down; this is the point when we can touch the depth. If we are honest enough with ourselves today we will know that when the curtain was down we felt that nothing had happened. The performance was very clever and very clean and very active, but it was not deep enough, and this was not the director's mistake but the cast's.

You can get this depth if you will remind yourselves why you are acting, and what is the aim. What have we to give the audience? We have to have something to give, and this must be the deep penetration, the deep understanding and dream about the play. For example; if you are acting Ghosts, or Hamlet, these are two entirely different kinds of depth. Just close your eyes and you will understand this. This is a very prac-

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tical point, and you must get this technique.

~~IDEA OF THE PLAY:~~

Another way is to appeal to the imagination of your cast, and with great patience tell them what the idea of the play is - what does it mean in this fairy tale to climb the mountain? What is the idea of the play? It is the path which every human being must take each day of his life. The director must explain the idea, the philosophy of the play. You must appeal to the imagination of your cast, and then your cast will get this depth from two sides - first from meditating on what is going on in the audience when the curtain has come down, and second from the meditation of fairy tales. The director must ask his cast to feel more deeply about the play than they do now.

RHYTHMICAL FORM OF THE PLAY:

You have not yet got the rhythmical pattern of this fairy tale play. For instance, the first "Look!" is a long rhythmical moment. Why have we tried to make the chart? We must meditate about that too. We must meditate on the rhythm and on the whole of the play. Your bodies are now becoming well developed in our exercises, but on the stage this is lost because of this lack of the pattern of the whole of the play.

If you will recall the performance today, you will see that the Copper Steed was one performance, the Silver Steed

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another, and the Golden Steed another, with no development or graduation in between. One big rhythmical pattern must be there and this can be done by putting all these pieces together. You have already found these rhythmical parts or pieces, now you must put them together. As the director, you must find the transitions between the parts, and show your cast and then ask them to meditate on the whole play. If you were producing a big play in four acts, you would have to do the same thing by bringing the pieces together.

When you get the play into a more rhythmical form, you will see that the end is weak. The start promises much more, but the end is weak. You must find something absolutely new, like the dance, which is not yet fulfilled. It is necessary to see the thing in another way because of this rhythmical form. If you will take only the Golden Steed part of the play then the ending is quite satisfactory, but this is not the whole play. You need many more objectives in different places, for different characters. It is very obvious that the actors are acting something very vague, because they don't know what they are doing as actors - they do not have objectives.

CROWDS - INDIVIDUALS:

There is another mistake; when the actors are members of the crowd they sometimes lose their individuality, and become a part of the crowd "in general". This is not good and it is very contagious. The director must remind his cast that

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they are actors and not members of a real crowd. It must not be a hypnotized mass as sometimes happens on the stage when the voices and movements belong to the crowd, and not to the individuals. On the other hand, instead of acting as members of the crowd scene some actors have been too individual; acting alone as it were they became too important, and the main characters lost their importance. These are two things we must escape.

LIGHTING:

The lighting in general is too light at the beginning and too dark later on. Everything is too clear, too much awake - you must start from nothing, from spiritual and physical darkness - the play begins from a deep sleep. The voices are too naturalistic, too free, too obvious. They must be in the style and atmospheres of the play. About the Black Prince, I would like to see him more powerful at the beginning and absolutely helpless at the end. In all the stages you must show a figure becoming less and less sure. The voice must be more powerful, more commanding at the beginning.

SPEECH:

The speech of the actors now begins to be something very beautiful - every word can be heard. I have never seen such quick development, it is a real wonder. You must not lose this quality but you must try to permeate it with the

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atmospheres. You may lose some of this quality on trying to do this, but it is a fight you must face.

COSTUMES:

The costumes are not too exaggerated - you may exaggerate them even more. The impression in the drawings will always be changed on the stage, and this is the process of growing.

It is good that the cast is able to keep the performance for the whole time. If you were to ask professional actors to play the whole play with so many gaps in the atmosphere and rhythm, etc., it would be very disturbing for them, but our students carry it through without any hysteria. This is a great achievement, and I know that you will be able to reach all that I have suggested. The only thing I have not yet seen is the depth, but you will be able to reach that. There are two levels which the actor must have, one inside where all these things are, and outside another level. If this were not a school I would not tell you all these things. Actors accept things and then forget them, and it is better not to tell them but to show, and then elaborate a rehearsal. But I have explained all this to you today, because it is like a lesson.

DIRECTORS - SUGGESTIONS FROM CAST:

After we have acted all our plays on the 17th of July,

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our directors will sit in various rooms and will accept the suggestions of the members of the group. There must be no discussion, but the director must write down all the suggestions he gets. The director must try to digest the suggestions, and during the summer he will have many, many things to think about. The director must not think that it is necessary for him to take all the suggestions, but to know what the people who are working with him think and feel and suggest, this is necessary. It is one of the ways to become a harmonious group.

I have done this in Moscow - sometimes I have asked questions of actors in whom I believed, and I got the answer. This is very helpful and very speaking. It enriches everything very much. It is not only interesting but necessary to know the opinion of all members of our creative society. Do you remember the performance of the 8th of March? What a difference! We are going on. So do not take my suggestions as negative things, but realize that the performance must be prepared.