

Booklet

(Brochure)

CHEKHOV

THEATRE

STUDIO

*

Dartington

Hall

Made in England
Printed at the Curwen Press
Plaistow, E. 13
1936

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FOREWORD

The Theatre goes back for its origin to religious mysteries. On the stage, as well as in religious services and ritual, men have attempted to lift themselves out of the humdrum world and to see themselves, their neighbors, and the world around them from some new and more spiritual point of view.

The development of civilization has progressively imposed restraint and privation upon human feeling as well as upon the ideals and aspirations of human nature; and it has been the special function of the Theatre to attempt to meet these emotional and idealistic needs so often left unsatisfied in the round of everyday life. For this purpose each pattern of culture has in the past developed its appropriate entertainment, that is, the presentation before people of some spectacle that fulfills a need often deeply felt, sometimes frustrated and seldom consciously recognized. Such entertainment tends to be as varied as man's experience, and ranges in the different ages from the Cretan bull-ring to the Greek theatre, from the pageantry of medieval jousting to the mystery play, from bull-baiting to Shakespearean drama, and from the dirt-track, the boxing ring, the football arena and the music hall to the professional drama and concert hall of today.

With the growing complexity of life in the twentieth century, and the capture of the professional theatre by moneyed interests which tend to exploit more primitive emotions at the cost of sacrificing ideals, there have grown up two significant movements. One is seen in an increasing breakaway from the professional stage of amateur and semi-professional groups. The other, initiated by Gordon Craig and Stanislavsky, was carried out both before and after the Revolution in Russia by the Moscow First Studio Theatre which later became the Second Moscow Art Theatre.

This second movement was an attempt to strengthen and deepen the appeal of the Theatre so that by more vigorous training of the individual actor, of the group, as well as of the producer himself, something comparable to a great orchestra in music might be evolved, capable of touching a new range of feeling, of depth and tenderness, of insight and humour.

Inspired by Stanislavsky, men like Sulerjitsky, Vachtangov and finally Michael Chekhov, all leaders of the Second Moscow Art Theatre carried this new movement forward. Vachtangov attempted on the stage the exploration of ever new external forms; Sulerjitsky, who loved his Dickens, concerned himself with the emotional content of the play, and wished to emphasize the moral qualities of his characters in order to stir up in his audience noble aspirations.

Chekhov carried their experiments a stage further.

He adopted the form experiments of Vachtangov, but insisted that these must be fused into one rhythmic whole within which every element must have its appointed place. Rhythm is for him the secret of significant drama and permeates every aspect of his production. Working upon Sulerjitsky's conception of moral qualities, which by itself was concerned primarily with emotions and feelings, he perceived the necessity of extracting from any play worthy of production some central idea. For Chekhov the intellect needs inspiration if it is to come alive, while on the other hand, the purely sentimental or emotional approach is not enough; feelings must be knit into an idea, and an idea into an ideal.

This movement has spread but slowly into the West. Indeed, save for a season here and there and a few isolated productions, it may be said that it has hardly yet left the country of its origin and her immediate neighbors. To Michael Chekhov are due such few opportunities as the West has had in recent years of seeing what this movement is aiming at. After working for many years in Moscow he appeared in various roles in Berlin, Vienna, Paris and New York. When the Dartington Hall Trustees learned that he would be free to found a Theatre Studio at Dartington they invited him to explore possibilities for the future. It had long been their desire to include Drama among the Arts activities carried on under their auspices at Dartington Hall, and

they were anxious to meet a growing demand for significant dramatic activity.

DARTINGTON HALL

No picture of the Chekhov Theatre Studio would be complete without some account of the Estate and Community of which it forms a part. Since 1925 Dartington Hall has been the centre of an experiment in rural development. The task which presented itself to the Founders was how to apply to rural conditions in a typically rural area those discoveries in the field of Art and Science which are being used increasingly by urban communities and which too often remain unknown in rural areas where tradition and custom still hold the field.

For want of access to new ways of work and recreation, rural areas seem either to disintegrate or tend to remain isolated and not readily open to those new-fangled notions which an earlier generation would have despised.

The town itself does not yet offer any solution to the essential problem or any satisfactory fulfillment of social and individual needs. With something of this in their minds the Founders of the Dartington Experiment acquired Dartington Estate in 1925. They proposed to develop the countryside on sound business lines, using the latest results of scientific research in agriculture, horticulture, and forestry, and to establish rural industries suitable to the district. They recognized that the possibility of

earning a decent living in the country does not necessarily imply a high or qualitative standard of life. They established therefore an educational centre. Its purpose is to train boys and girls, and in addition, to supply teachers and workers who are competent to give direction and encouragement in the creative use of leisure.

After ten years there has grown up in and around the ancient manor of Dartington Hall a number of activities all of which are an expression of the needs and desires of the community. Agriculture, horticulture and forestry, together with the ancient Devon industries of cider-making and textile weaving, are now established departments of Dartington Hall Ltd. In addition the Dartington Hall Trustees have founded and endowed two schools, Elementary and Secondary, which are both co-educational and progressive, and which are for children of all ages from two to eighteen.

In this way some of the educational needs of the community are catered for, and it is an essential part of the scheme that educational facilities should be as readily available for those who work in the country as they already are for townspeople. Education, however, should not end at eighteen, and it is part of the function of the school authorities to provide a variety of educational opportunity for adult workers on the estate. The Department of Arts now includes an Art Studio with one or two resident artists, a Music Section, the Jooss-Leeder School of Dance, the

Ballet Jooss, and the Chekhov Theatre Studio.

The Trustees do not expect every Rural Community of the future to be able to endow and support educational enterprises of this kind, but it is their hope that out of the Department of Arts at Dartington will come young men and women capable of going into all kinds of communities as teachers, producers, or artists, and of holding up high standards of creative activity in the field of the Arts.

CHEKHOV THEATRE STUDIO

The Chekhov Theatre Studio has set before itself a number of ideals. In the forefront of these is a desire to make the Theatre representative of the best in contemporary thought and to use everything that was valuable in the drama of the past. Classical plays drawn from the literature of the world, Shakespeare, and the best work of modern playwrights, together with plays suitable for a children's theatre, will be studied with this end in view.

First aimtheStudio

In the Studio ^{study} will be undertaken deeply and painstakingly in an endeavour to penetrate to the inner meaning of an author's intention, and to discover thereby greater depths in a play and a wider interpretation of character. The direction of such work will always be towards a synthesis of the elements in a play through its principal ethical idea. In all its work the Studio will struggle against the absence of an ideal in the contemporary naturalistic theatre. Modern problems are so serious, so intricate, and so tortuous that if a solution is to be offered in the theatre, the theatre must leave the ways of mere imitation and naturalism and probe beneath the surface.

Newmethods ofstudy

To present a play so studied, a closer examination is needed of the means of expression. This will lead therefore to a severe scrutiny of the tools at an actor's

means of disposal, and it is an aim of the Chekhov Studio to examine
Expression anew every aspect of expression which the Theatre offers.
second aim All technique must be re-scrutinized and re-vitalized;
of the external technique must be permeated by the power of a
Studio living spirit; inner technique must be developed until the
 capacity for receiving creative inspiration is acquired.

The Studio will attempt to weld into one harmony all the elements of theatrical expression. A production will be composed like a symphony following certain fundamental laws of construction, and its power to affect the public should be equal to that of musical composition.

Third aim Composition, harmony and rhythm are the forces of the new
of the theatre. Such a production should be intelligible to every
Studio spectator regardless of language or of intellectual content.

An attempt to evolve a new type of actor, producer, author and designer will form an important part of the Studio's work. No less important will be a new type of audience. Hitherto the theatre has had producers and directors of genius, actors of outstanding personality and authors sufficiently master of their craft to provide plays. Where the theatre has failed has been in bringing about a satisfactory fusion of all these elements. In order to realize a new harmony every participant in the theatre must extend his knowledge and experience. An actor should, to some degree, be also a director, a scene painter, a costume designer, and even an author and musician; an author must

know the psychology and practical needs of his actors; while a producer must be expert in lighting, décor and costume making. Nor is it only technical proficiency which will benefit. The new type of actor, producer, playwright, and artist will develop in himself the power to carry a moral responsibility for what arises in the soul of the spectator. Without such feeling it would be hopeless to seek deep results in the theatre where work should be in the highest sense of the word co-operative. In the far distant past an artist felt himself to be the servant of the highest in humanity. To recapture something of this aspect is not the least of the ambitions which the Chekhov Studio sets itself.

Subject
matter

It is the belief of the Studio that mankind's problems have shifted their ground in the decade and a half that has elapsed since the war; they are not only psychological but sociological, and it is important to distinguish between social problems and problems which belong properly to the realm of politics. It is not with politics that the Chekhov Studio is concerned. The Studio believes that for some of the social problems besetting the modern world the theatre can offer at least a means of study and possibly a solution. Perhaps the solution lies in a study of the personal factor, for though psychological problems may give way before those of a sociological nature, the personal factor persists. It is the aim of the Chekhov Studio to

present personal problems, not as an end in themselves, but in their relation to the social background.

There has been a tendency in modern times towards an undue emphasis upon what is morbid and unbalanced. This comes in the main from the period of confusion and bewilderment which the world has gone through. It should be the function of the new theatre to break away from this tendency, to reveal the heroic in preference to the defeated and to recall the greatness of the human spirit in its age-long struggle with adversity. The Studio will endeavour to discover in what facets of life the heroic quality still flourishes; it will then attempt to draw this quality once more onto its stage, and will demonstrate that the hero is still, as in the past, proper material for the theatre.

A new type
of hero

The function of tragedy should be to wrestle with emptiness and superficiality, while comedy should evoke joy and a love of life. Humour will be a vital element, particularly the healthy laughter which is an expression of man's happiness and a light let in upon the world's difficulties.

Humour

But the straw from which theatrical bricks are made will always remain in the plays themselves. For a new theatre it will not be enough to perform old plays; the new theatre, if it is to have vitality, must write its own plays. These plays must be constructed in such a way as to give the new theatrical principles their fullest scope; for

A new type
of play

this purpose the Studio must evolve a playwright who, working with the group, will devote to it as much of his time and energy as do the actors themselves.

The audi-
ence

If the new theatre is to have meaning, the audience too must play its part. In the Studio therefore, special periods will be set aside, in which on the one hand, actors, authors, producers, musicians and scene painters, and on the other hand a specially selected group of people to act as audience, will by means of practical work investigate the methods by which a closer contact between stage and audience may be established. They will devote themselves to a careful research into the psychological problem which is implicit in the relationship between stage and audience.

DRAMA COURSE

Duration of
course

The complete course is planned to extend over three years. Since one of the objectives of the Studio is to form from among its students a professional touring group, selection will take place during the entire period.

The Director reserves the right to release at any time those who fail to reach the required standard of accomplishment or improvement. The final selection of members for the touring group will not be made before the end of the three year course.

I. EXERCISES

- (a) Training in concentration and use of the imagination are fundamental in creative work.
- (b) Speech-formation (Rudolf Steiner method). The study aims at awakening and freeing living forces of speech and developing the plastic movement and musical element therein. Special attention is paid to the understanding of language not only as an intellectual, but also as an artistic medium.
- (c) Eurhythmy, or Visible Speech. A new art of movement inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner.
- (d) Body. Emphasis will be laid upon the fact that the body is the instrument of the dramatic artist. T

There will be elementary instruction in fencing, acrobatics, tumbling, etc., and in certain forms of light athletics and gymnastics, as well as special training in gesture as a means of expression conveying the most delicate of emotions and meanings.

2. DRAMATIC STUDIES, IMPROVISATIONS, AND EXTRACTS FROM PLAYS

Students will at first work only upon short extracts and simple improvisations and studies. Thereafter, as they progress, the scope of their work will be increased until they are equipped to master the most difficult problems of dramatic art. In this way they will obtain a knowledge of the method in small portions at a time according to individual capabilities.

3. PRODUCTIONS

The dramatic studies will be followed by the preparation of an entire play. Students will learn the technique of studying whole productions with special reference to the methods necessary for a thorough approach to the main idea of a play.

4. LAWS OF COMPOSITION, HARMONY AND RHYTHM

It will be necessary for students to acquire a feeling for composition, harmony and rhythm, not in a specific musical sense, but in a form adaptable to the uses of the theatre. A certain amount of experience in harmony

and rhythm will be obtained during their dramatic exercises. The exercises will be designed to give a rhythmic control that is both spiritual as well as physical. Only in this way can absolute control be maintained during performances. In conjunction with the exercises for harmony and rhythm, students will study the characteristics of certain musical compositions and will receive instruction in choral singing.

5. STAGE DESIGN, LIGHTING, MAKE-UP, ETC.

Students will learn to design sets, to obtain proficiency in make-up (together with a study of the anatomy of the face), to design and make costumes and to build simple sets with properties. They will also experiment with colour and lighting effects upon a specially constructed model stage.

6. CO-ORDINATED EXPERIMENTAL WORK

The purpose of experimental work in the theatre is to bring together in practical form all the elements of instruction in the Studio. Students will be given opportunity to express original artistic ideas, whether as actors, producers, playwrights, scene painters, or costume designers.

7. LECTURES ON THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEATRE AND PLAYWRITING

8. APPEARANCES BEFORE A SELECTED AUDIENCE

In the course of each year students will appear before a selected audience of spectators. These appearances

will be demonstrations of the Studio work and will consist of simple exercises, études, etc. They will further serve the purpose of developing in students a proper relationship to spectators.

9. PUBLIC APPEARANCES

Each year of the course will conclude with a public appearance on the stage of the Theatre. As with the more private occasions mentioned in paragraph 8, these public appearances will be in the nature of demonstrations of the year's work. They will be somewhat wider in scope and will include selected passages from plays. At the conclusion of the entire course several complete plays will be presented to the public. Thereafter, should they qualify and should they desire to do so, students will join the Studio's professional Group and commence the preparation of plays to be presented during the tour of the Group.

TOURING GROUP

It has been one of the tragedies of theatrical endeavour that it was of necessity ephemeral; actors, producer, scene designers and musicians, have come together for a season and have separated to other ventures and other plays. Students in the Chekhov Studio, as well as receiving an all round training in the theatre, will be given an opportunity to pass into a group which will take the work of the Studio to the outside world. Members of the Group will work upon a salary basis as in any company, but they will enjoy an additional advantage in having security over a long period. From time to time the Group will return to prepare new tours; from the Studio it will recruit new talent and new ideas; and it will thus be assured of a constant stream of inspiration to revivify its qualities and maintain its vitality.

MICHAEL CHEKHOV

Michael Chekhov, nephew of Anton Chekhov, the playwright, was born in St. Petersburg in 1891. He showed leanings towards the stage quite early in life, and as a child was never content to be himself, but at home and at school, even in the street on the way to school, was always acting.

While still very young he joined an amateur acting group, thus taking the first step towards a stage career. Amateur work however soon failed to satisfy him, and at eighteen he entered Souvorine's School of the Theatre in St. Petersburg. Thereafter he worked for one year in the St. Petersburg Valy Theatre, and eventually he received an invitation from Moscow to join the Moscow Art Theatre.

Here he grew and developed under the personal direction of Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Danchenko.

Later he joined the First Studio in the year it was founded, and for several years took part in its direction and management in the company of such men as Sulerjitsky and Vachtangov. For five years, however, from 1923 until 1928, during the period when the First Studio became The Second Moscow Art Theatre, he was left to carry on the work single-handed.

During this stage of his career he was busy training his company and developing them in accordance with his own ideas. He taught and lectured to working men's clubs and theatrical groups, and at the same time carried on his own dramatic school, out of which many new actors came to join the Art Theatres in Moscow, many of whom are still there. During this period he created numerous parts such as Malvolio, Hamlet, and Caleb in The Cricket on the Hearth; as Chlestakov in The Inspector General, and as Strindberg's Eric XIV. He also played in his own adaptations from Anton Chekhov's novels.

During 1928 he went abroad in order to become acquainted with theatrical life in other countries. For a time he worked as producer with the Habima Players, and in Germany met Max Reinhardt, whose methods he had an opportunity of studying when he played in Reinhardt productions in Berlin and Vienna. Subsequently he worked in Paris, in Kaunas and in Riga, where he produced the opera Parsifal, together with several plays on the Russian, Latvian and Lithuanian stages.

In Riga, upon the advice of the Latvian Actor's Union, he organized a Theatrical School which has since become an established theatre; he also gave several series of lectures to Latvian, Lithuanian, and Russian actors.

In 1935 an opportunity came of touring America, and at the end of the American season he crossed to England to found a Theatre Studio at Dartington Hall.

Michael Chekhov's theatrical development falls naturally into three periods: in the first he was preoccupied with his work as an actor; in the second he was engaged in solving the problems which confronted a director; and in the third he had become a teacher.

As an actor he found that actors concentrated on their parts to the exclusion of everything else, that they observed nothing of what was going on around them, and had no comprehension of the play as a whole. Chekhov found that, owing to the concentration of the actors on their own parts, a production was too often without unity or cohesion.

There gradually developed in him a desire to find some means of bringing harmony to the whole production. The necessity for harmony forced him to search for new methods in production, and that he should become a director therefore was no more than a logical outcome. In the second of the periods he gradually developed his method for harmonizing a production; but as director he found that his scope was limited and that he had not yet achieved his aim. It was not easy for actors who had been trained in the old way to follow new ideas and to assume a new technique. Therefore his mind moved naturally to the next step: new actors must be trained for his purpose, and it was incumbent upon him therefore to become a teacher.

Throughout these periods each step led to the next: from actor to director, from director to teacher was a

logical sequence; each change was impelled by the necessity of grappling with problems inherent in the period preceding.

REDWORTH HOUSE

Students in the Chekhov Theatre Studio have their living quarters at Redworth House, Totnes. This is a large residence which the Dartington Hall Trustees have recently converted into a modern and well-equipped hostel. The house lies on the outskirts of the ancient borough of Totnes and close to the drive gates leading to Dartington Hall. The gardens at Redworth, to which the students have ready access, are large and charmingly laid out.

In the house itself, which is centrally heated, there are twelve bedrooms (one, two, and three beds), an adequate supply of bathrooms and fitted basins, a dining-room, a comfortable lounge for students, together with one or two rooms for reading and study.

The housekeeping and catering arrangements are superintended from Dartington Hall, but at Redworth there is a resident cook-housekeeper in charge of the kitchen and staff.

Quiet is of great importance in a hostel which caters for students who have to spend a large part of the day at work elsewhere. At Redworth no pains have been spared to make the residents comfortable; while the nature of the house itself, with its large and well-planned rooms, does much to ensure quiet after the day's work.

Applications and enquiries should be
addressed to:

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