

Michael Chekhev

November 25, 1936

THE ACTOR'S NATURE
FIRE - THE DESIRE TO ACT

Vakhtangov

The Golden Steed:

Let us continue the work of finding a name which would express the whole scene - the most characteristic point in the scene. In order to find this name we are forced to look through special spectacles in order to find the most characteristic forms.

Number 4 begins with the entrance of the Guard bringing food. After the First Steed has disappeared, the evil force is triumphant. From this point of view, try to see the crowd divide into two parts - good and evil - which was born in Number 2 scene and now begins to exist separately. We must have just a feeling as if something has happened on the stage - not too clear.

The evil people make a group by taking the bread.

Number 5 begins with the entrance of the White Old Man and Antin. The action of the crowd is divided - the good group is aware of Antin and the mountain, and the evil group is with the Guard. We must elaborate each part of the gesture we have already found - each rehearsal must add to it.

THE ACTOR'S NATURE:

An actor is a person who has more power than anyone else, and you must show this power. The audience is the best

director in the world. Vakhtangov once said that he always sat in the audience room because then he know the right effect. The actor's instinct must be there - you must know what means something for the audience.

FIRE - THE DESIRE TO ACT:

You must understand and speak with yourself very honestly about what I am going to say. You must know that no school in the world is able to give you the quality which we call the quality of an actor. It must be given by Nature. The actor is a person, a being who burns. Without this fire, nobody can be an actor in the real sense because to speak words on the stage does not mean to be an actor - anyone can do it who is not dumb.

An actor is one who feels from the nature and from childhood, "I want to do something," not "I want to speak." You must ask yourself whether you wish to do something on the stage, and if the answer is, "Yes," then you have a reason to be in a school. If you find very very deep in your soul this fire, this desire to act, not to speak, then the school can take away one layer after another from you and show you and give you in your hands your own fire. Your own fire - that is the secret.

For instance, you can have the fire to be a thinker or a sculptor, but the actor's fire is a special fire which forces the person to act, and, therefore, it is absolutely important for each one of you to ask yourself whether you want

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to act - whether you want to burn - or not. If you will go so deep into your own soul and conscience and get the answer that you don't want to act, then it is better to tell yourself, "I want to draw," "I want to write plays," "I want to teach children," but not to act.

Perhaps you can do this, each one of you. Ask yourself whether you are born as an actor. That is the first thing. Second, the things we are trying to do here are very simple - but our exercises will be much more difficult and complicated with time. If you are not able to do these simple exercises with fire, I doubt that you will be able to do more complicated exercises with fire. You must find this fire in your everyday life now. If you find this fire, then we have a great chance to create a group of actors. Without fire the actor has nothing to do, and without fire the director has nothing to do.

We have had an example with Eleanor - she has fire it is clear, but until today she thought that she could do everything being cool. This is absolutely wrong, and every one of us must remember this case and try to find this fire. Let it burn very crudely - it is not yet an art, only fire and smoke. Please let it be smoke and fire. Then we have to bring this fire and smoke into form. This is the work of the school. But never think that a teacher or school can give you fire.

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Why do I speak of this? Because I see each one of you burning, but not during the lesson. When we have a respite, there is much gaiety. You must change this psychology and find where you must use your fire. If you are tired here and have used much fire during the lesson, then you will want to be quiet during the respite. This is a question of your own decision - where you must use your fire - here or there. When you come to the school, you must not think, "He, the director, will do something with us." I am not able to do anything with you if you will not reach out your hand, and your hand is your fire. If your hands are tied behind you, what can I do with you? I try to do everything, but I have to have your hands, your will, to help me because we are creating something together. I alone cannot do it, and you alone are not able to do it either. There are no moments in our profession when we have to work without fire.

Exercise with balls, sticks, veils.

Exercise in incorporation of images:

1. A gentleman with a stick
2. A laborer
3. A lady with a dog

Proposed program for Saturday's open class:

1. Staccato and legato exercise.
2. Waterfall
3. Atmosphere
4. Sculpture
5. Rope

Program for Dance School:

1. An actual rehearsal with the director
2. Concentration, imagination, incorporation of images
3. Prose and poetry
4. Group exercises
5. Atmosphere sketch - The Fishing Scene
6. Waterfall, boxes, and chairs
7. Contact exercise.

Incorporation of images from The Golden Steed:

To find a character means that if you are able to do everything as the character, then your part is ready. If you are able to do only what is given in the play, it is not the right standard. Therefore, you must always ask yourself whether you are able to do everything in your life as the character. If not, you have to work again and again. You must improve your character and make it more original - make it your own creation.