

Michael Chekhov

October 28, 1938

PLANS FOR PERFORMANCE
HUMOR MUST BE JUSTIFIED
EVERYTHING MUST BE
TAKEN SERIOUSLY
TEMPO AS QUALITY
CHARACTERIZATION

Criticism of the basis of the improvisations of the
Commedia del'Arte - Spanish Evening.

Before the question will be decided as to how many
actors we will require from the outside, we must know how
many parts we can cast from our own group. The point of view
will be whether it is good enough to be shown before the audi-
ence, because this is our aim. So I will choose you after
trying you in many parts. I will see to which parts your
artistic emotions respond most. This will be mixed with the
artistic work and the development of the whole play simultane-
ously.

Hurd is the manager's son and Paul is to go on with
the role of the manager. Paul must find the character in
quite a different tempo. Try to demonstrate the character
which will be based on the following "trick" - he is just
about to say something because he is full of ideas, and then
when he speaks it is very quickly, as if stuttering. He never
has the time to say anything because he is constantly stutter-
ing, but so that his words will be understood. Hurd must
imagine a tall figure like Don Quixote, absolutely absent-
minded. He is looking at things without seeing them. Be
acquainted with the text so that you can show some improvisations.

M. Chekhov

October 28, 1938

Mary La must know some scenes instead of Beatrice - the scene with Paul as the Barber, for instance. Paula must prepare Minjaga.

HUMOR MUST BE JUSTIFIED:

For everyone: I gave you yesterday the suggestion not to make the audience laugh by the means of trying to be funny. This does not mean that tricks or exaggerated things are not allowed - they are allowed and are desirable, but without any inner justification they are not allowed. For instance, if I shout with a loud high voice, but am inwardly dead it will be nothing, but if it is justified from inside that is what I want to see. You will get this from your imagination. I don't want to clip your wings, but I want you to know that if it is not justified inwardly then they are bones and not wings, and are unpleasant to see.

EVERYTHING MUST BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY:

Now, what I wish for today: Another mistake which you must discard at once as professional actors - you do not take seriously all these situations and therefore you are wrong. Take everything as though it were a drama. For instance, take the problem of dressing yourself seriously, making sure that everything is in the right place. Whatever you are doing you must do it seriously. Simple elementary things which must be there on the stage always, whether it is a clown trick or the highest tragedy. At the moment everyone pretends to be

M. Chekhov

October 28, 1938

gay or to embrace one another, and this pretending will absolutely stop our work because your artistic feeling will not respond to this false invitation. I have seen two things which were quite outstanding from this point of view: Alan has taken the business of sewing seriously, and Deirdre has made love to Woodie absolutely seriously, therefore it was convincing although not gay. Truth is the condition for everything. These two things are essential: 1. Do everything but justify it. 2. Take it all seriously.

TEMPO AS QUALITY:

If we understand tempo as haste, it will always be wrong, but if you understand tempo as the quality which you need it is an entirely different thing. This is the right understanding of tempo. Actors understand tempo only as haste. Tempo must be quality. If you take the tempo as the quality of staccato you will get it at once. The world of qualities which surround a certain scene which we are going to elaborate. If we can continue our work on rhythm you will see that everything can be turned as a quality, which makes our profession so beautiful. I can tell you to take the tempo as quality and you can do it absolutely simply.

CHARACTERIZATION:

The Manager's character: he speaks with a stutter, he is an old man, and his only cherished possession is his box of tickets. Minjaca's character: she gives an order with

M. Chekhov

October 28, 1938

each word.

Your task is to continue to develop these characters and parts in your imaginations, and then try to incorporate them out of your intuition. Your intuition must come as the result of your work as students. Try to coax out your intuition. Go through the whole scene slowly; sentence by sentence, trying to find the right style of comedy near to vaudeville. Act as freely as you want, but if you will take points of the Method freely it will be very good. Try to find the spine and the progression of the scene, also the spine of the individual characters throughout the scene.