

Michael Chekhov

November 1, 1939

INTERVIEW WITH THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

THE CHOICE OF THE POSSESSED
THE ACTING COMPANY
CHARACTERIZATION AND THE ARCHETYPE
THE IDEAS OF THE PLAY
HUMOR
SOURCE OF PLAYS
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Anton Chekhov

Michael Chekhov: The French audience practically orders the actors to amuse them, the German audience comes already prepared to criticize, but the American audience is the best because it comes openly and is the most simple and sincere and the most ready to accept everything.

THE CHOICE OF THE POSSESSED:

My reason for doing The Possessed was that I thought the modern psychology of the European life is very similar to the ideas and psychology which is described by Dostoyevsky in this novel. Many of his words and problems and prophecies seem to be very pertinent for today. That was one point. Another point was that we had chosen this play when we were on the other side of the ocean. Perhaps for America I would not have chosen it, but as we had already prepared the play, we brought it here because it was almost impossible to throw away and discard the work which had been done. I must frankly say that I would think more carefully of starting this production here. It would have meant something more to the English and

8492
M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

the European people because here we have only the mirror of the facts which are going on over there. England would have accepted it more easily.

THE ACTING COMPANY:

We have always had in our school a majority of American students so that we, as it were, came home. Also, some of our students joined us here in America, so part of the cast had rehearsed in Dartington and some joined here. As our group originated from the school, so in many exercises which they have worked upon I gave them scenes from the play. Actually we started rehearsing very late but longer than is usual.

Reviewer's question: The use of character in the usual sense is not as necessary as in an ordinary play because of the fact that your aim was to show the ideas.

CHARACTERIZATION AND THE ARCHETYPE:

Michael Chekhov: One of the principles of our studio is the attempt to get through the character and the text to what we call the archetype, and that will always make a certain difference between our performance and that of others. The very idea of the character which we call the archetype.

THE IDEAS OF THE PLAY:

I am not able to make any compromises, but I think it is necessary to make plays more in harmony with the audience

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

without making any compromise. By compromise I mean to satisfy the audience in the cheapest possible way and that would be out of the question for me. For me, first of all, the play is a series of ideas which I want to have in all our productions, whether in humorous or dramatic performances. I have certain ideas which I would not give up at any cost. The question is not one of compromise, but adapting.

Reviewer: I am very anxious to see your company do a comedy.

HUMOR:

Michael Chekhov: About comedy - I must say that humor and laughter are as important as religious problems - perhaps they are more important, but what kind of humor, that is the point. From my point of view it cannot be offensive or too superficial or critical. I think it is a great mission if it is understood properly.

Reviewer: In other words, humor has to spring from the idea, just as it does in a serious situation. Do you intend to appear in any of the plays yourself?

Michael Chekhov: It is very difficult to act without knowing the language, and I don't think I will ever be able to manage the English language so that I can act.

Reviewer: If an idea can transcend the limitation of drama, why not of language?

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

Michael Chekhov: But if the language does not sit in the heart and brain and hands. For instance, I speak English, but I am looking for the words.

Reviewer: I suppose that touches one of the fundamentals of your acting. Many European actors on the American stage are not any more at home than you are, but perhaps they do not put the demands on themselves that you would, and so they are willing to use a language in which they are not at home. You would say that an actor, unless he is at home in a physical way, as well as the language, would not be able to act. Is that why you have all young American and English actors in the company?

Michael Chekhov: We try to avoid actors with accents in our group.

SOURCE OF PLAYS:

Reviewer: Are you going to do Anton Chekhov's plays?

Michael Chekhov: First of all, I think they are too limited, too Russian, and even for Russian people they are already past.

Reviewer: Are there any modern Russian plays which you would like to do?

Michael Chekhov: No, because they are all more or less propaganda plays which I cannot accept.

Reviewer: Where do you see the richer fields for the plays which you want to do - from what literary source? Do you want to do adaptations?

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

Michael Chekhov: My personal feeling is that adaptations are always much more interesting to work on than the written plays, but that is my personal opinion. I have nothing against plays, and perhaps we will take such plays very often.

Reviewer: Have you come across any new, interesting American plays which you would like to do?

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS:

Michael Chekhov: We are always looking for them. I personally love Shakespeare very much, but I don't think we could produce one of his plays at this time because we have one or two more years of experience before we can speak his lines. It is my objective ultimately when my group is more ripe.