

Notes Taken During Conversation¹

RHYTHM AS A LIVING BEING
THE DIFFERENT AIMS OF PROFESSIONAL AND
AMATEUR GROUPS

Moscow Art Theatre

Now is the moment for the new theatre. It is in the air. You must feel it. This is not a mental calculation. It is in the air, and comes to us as inspiration. If you have open ears and open eyes for what is necessary now in the world, you must sense the need for a new kind of theatre.

RHYTHM AS A LIVING BEING:

First it is necessary to have rhythm. In all the arts today artists are fighting for rhythm. And the theatre has no rhythm - none at all. What they call rhythm in the theatre today is not rhythm at all. At its best it is only meter. They cannot find the real rhythm, and they don't want to find it. We have some ways to find it, and when we begin to work, you will see how really important it is.

Rhythm makes a person free - free from bad habits and free from narrow ways. For example, an embarrassed person on entering a room becomes disintegrated. His whole body falls into separate parts; that is why he is clumsy and awkward. This is true of art. It is a heap of bits. A little bit of something that is nothing. There the actor's gift or talent cannot help him.

M. Chokhov

April 17, 1936

The theatre of today lacks something, some element which would make it a creative whole - that is why the theatre is so stupid. That quality is rhythm. Now only the rhythm of the idea - the Moscow Art theatre can find the rhythm of the idea - but that is not enough. The right idea is unifying, but we have other parts of our being. We must have an idea which is permeated with the feeling, which is unifying us. We must have a unifying will, a unifying idea, and feelings; and if this unifying will, idea, and feeling are there over us, it is as if a highest being. And if this unifying idea, feeling, and will is moving, then we have rhythm. This is very abstract, but it will come to us as we work gradually as if by itself. If we serve this invisible thing with our whole being, then we will come gradually to grasp what is rhythm. This invisible thing is like a high super-being - it is our angel, who is guarding over us, inspires us, and to whom we can turn as the center of our work. Without this feeling that this rhythm is a living being, we cannot grasp it. It is a real being. We create it, and it re-creates us. This is always true in art and in science. The higher the level of the artist or scientist, the more he realizes that what we are accustomed to on the physical earth is another kind of understanding. For example, you cannot go through a chair in the ordinary world, but in art or in religion we can do it. That is the miracle of art.

M. Chekhov

April 17, 1936

Our minds must change gradually and naturally. It will happen as of itself because it is the truth, and the truth will come to us and we to the truth, absolutely naturally. This sounds an abstraction but it really isn't, and we will prove it in our work. If we have an idea, it must be our idea, and it can be reached. We must reach our ideal, and we can do it. You will see.

THE DIFFERENT AIMS OF PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR GROUPS:

What we must work for among amateurs is the right attitude of mind. If they want to be actors, then they must come to the school and spend years learning their profession, but if they are not willing to do this, then they must realize that they do it [acting] just to develop themselves as human beings. We are starting a great work in starting as professionals, and the Amateur Group cannot compete with us. We can help them very much if they understand that they are amateurs and that their aim must be to work for pleasure and relaxation and a finer understanding of plays, but they are not an acting company.

One of the worst features of the theatre today is the belief that everyone can be an actor, playwright, scene designer, etc. They have no real respect for the theatre. Somebody must help them to understand that for us acting is a profession, our life work - we don't interfere with their daily work, so why should they harm ours?

M. Chekhov

April 17, 1936

We must speak definitely and clearly about our feelings. They may be angry, but that does not matter. They must be made to understand the difference between the professional and the amateur point of view. Mr. Elmhirst can do this because he loves the idea of rural and community work. We will always be glad to help them but only on the condition that they understand where we both stand.