

Michael Chekhov

November 1, 1939

PRESENCE ON THE STAGE
ATMOSPHERE
OUR METHOD
MAKE-UP

Meeting with the Group after the closing of The Possessed:

About today's performance - you have been free to act for some time lately. However, there are good sides and bad sides - you are acting more and more surely and easily, and the audience feels a certain form there, a certain presence. But there are some danger points, about which I must warn you.

PRESENCE ON THE STAGE:

The first mistake is that you lower the performance so much that it is almost a catastrophe. We must be proud of our expressiveness - to be without it on the stage has nothing to do with art or with our theatre. I will never give in to this criticism. You must accept this activity and presence of the whole human being on the stage, which the modern theatre cannot accept because they have become used to this inactivity. On the stage we see activity which is still lower than what we see on the streets. But I cannot do this for you. I can only make a "revolution" with you - to show the full capacity of the human being so that everything they scold us for makes us proud.

Today you have lowered the performance to the usual standard and that is not our aim. I must always remind you to be present on the stage - attack the audience. Rembrandt

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

attacks his audience with his art. Today was dangerous for our theatre because you were not present on the stage. It was very concrete acting, but we did not feel where the human being was behind the figures. The most precious thing on earth, the human being, was not there.

ATMOSPHERE:

You must practice using atmospheres - almost not scene had an atmosphere today. This is again something which spoils you. Why have we been training all these abilities? For years and years we have worked, and the atmosphere is not there! I give you the opportunity to strengthen your desire to act better, and not worse. I rely upon your knowledge and training, I rely upon your human and professional abilities to increase the good sides. Human nature is lazy, but we are fighters, and we cannot allow ourselves to relax. We have to overcome so much destructive criticism, and we can only do it if we are firm enough to fight for everything in the Method.

OUR METHOD:

We have to go on - consider yourselves as fighters with your ability to spread the atmosphere, to be present on the stage, to grasp the whole scene and the play with the feeling of the whole. Everything is all right, but there is nothing going on when there are only speeches and cues and pauses - it does not make a scene because the actors don't

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

have the feeling of the whole. If you don't feel the points of the Method, you will only limp and fall down and become just the usual type of actors. Everybody can act on the stage, but to act as you have, not everyone can do, and that I am proud of. Please keep our weapons very strong. Our group can do something different. We will be scolded and beaten, but we will be victorious, if you will believe in our small "revolution."

MAKE-UP:

Be careful with your make-up - they have become schematic - each evening you must create the character anew - you must sit every night before the mirror and create the make-up. To create a theatre without principles that is so easy, but it is not our way.

* * * * *

Beatrice:

We can answer some of the questions about our future, which we all have in our minds. Let us review what we have achieved so that we can get from it the results. When we started The Possessed, we never really expected it to be a box office success. From the beginning we took for granted that it would be a failure - only in the last two weeks we began to think it would be a success. But because we felt that it

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

was the best example in which our group could be shown and because of its theme, we decided to show it. We counted on it being a failure, but we felt it was worth the trying.

I think we achieved our aim. Our audience and our critics have not called us a dull group - we have done what we said we would; we have aroused their hatred or their laughter. Everyone is talking about it. So the ground is well sowed for our next production. We have made a first step. Each critic has judged us from his own point of view, but none has been lukewarm. We are on the map, we have a few followers, and a few people who will be interested to see what we will do next. We have achieved more unity within the group. Now we are going back to Ridgely with a professional feeling and attitude and a strength among ourselves. We have had the experience of playing before Broadway audiences, and we will come back.

How we should come back? We wanted to have two faces to show the audience so that we would not receive a one-sided criticism. But now our funds have disappeared in the production of The Possessed. We have got to fight from two points of view - we have got to do something which we can get backers for. We have started to organize such a campaign.

The immediate steps are: a week's holiday for everyone, then back to Ridgely to immediately commence rehearsals of Pickwick. If we can get backers for it, we

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1939

will do it, if not, we can't. While we are rehearsing Pickwick, we will be looking around for two other plays, and we will take suggestions from anyone regarding such plays. We have got to get Pickwick ready quickly. We hope to prepare two plays at least so that we can return to Broadway with two plays, and we can tour with them.

M. Chekhov:

Touring is always our aim, but it again depends on finances.

Beatrice:

We have had the pleasure of living alone, and it may be hard for some of us at Ridgely, but we must go back and prepare to work hard now that we are a professional company.