TRANSFORMING ACTOR TRAINING:
MICHAEL CHEKHOV’S PSYCHO-PHYSICAL TECHNIQUE

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Bren Wion
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TRANSFORMING ACTOR TRAINING:
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Thesis

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband and family, who have patiently and supportively allowed me to direct productions and to complete my master’s work. It also is in memory of Dr. Paul Daum, who was the professor with whom I had the most in common and from whom I gained the encouragement to develop my weakness into strength.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The leaders of the Chekhov Workshop, held in Maine, made clear the work of Michael Chekhov. In the process, they demonstrated how to understand myself and the world around me at a more conscious level. Mala Powers, Lisa Dalton, and Will Kilroy, enthusiastically impart Chekhov’s work to others. They provide useful instruction and guidance so their students have the ability to talk about Michael Chekhov and to provide visual information about his technique. Sadly, Mala Powers died in June, 2007.
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Aristotle wrote the first dramatic criticism in Greece during fourth century B.C. He divided the elements of drama into six major components, which remain the recognized standard today. Three of the components are considered external (spectacle, music, diction) and three are considered internal (character, theme, plot). Through the centuries, great strides have been made in the areas of the external elements. More elaborate, spectacular and technologically advanced theatre spaces have been established. Music has continued to grow and develop around the world through many distinct periods. Diction and the quality of amplifying, producing, and recording sounds and voices have changed drastically. The internal elements, however, have not evolved to the same degree. Themes and plots rely on a few basic premises, oral stories and literary works of the past for inspiration. According to Georges Polti’s text, The Thirty-six Dramatic Situations, there are thirty six-basic premises to which most stories can be traced. William Shakespeare, one of the greatest dramatists, used already conceived ideas, historical accounts, and existing literary works as the raw material he would creatively shape into a new form. Lastly, the creation, development, and portrayal of characters have undergone the slowest transformation since ancient times.

In the eighteenth century, actors on stage were still taught that performance meant imitation. Stage performers demonstrated the accepted and relatively generic gestures and
expressions for feelings. Words such as “love,” “betrayal,” and “passion” were yelled at the top of the actor’s voice. When an actor finished with an impressive monologue, he would raise his right hand and exit the stage – formally. Some actors found their niche in this type of performing, but others envisioned acting creating a more powerful impact. These forward-thinking actors understood the necessity of more thorough training to access that power. Effective actor training didn’t begin until the nineteenth century and still hasn’t reached the levels of Aristotle’s external components of drama and theatre. Around the world, innovative and sensitive individuals are trying to transform the way actors are trained, performances are directed and audiences are reached. Today, individuals responsible for training actors at the high school level are trying to understand how this transformation is best accomplished for their unique situation.

In the state of Ohio, high school directors responsible for actor training also have seen many challenges and changes. Directors, especially those certified prior to 1990, are allowed to teach drama and direct, but often have not been trained to do the job well. The state did not require applicable coursework be completed, nor did the state ensure that necessary skills were acquired before awarding comprehensive communication certification. Conversely, professionals with directing experience had no way of becoming certified because colleges didn’t offer programs to train and prepare high school directors. Sometimes these experienced directors were replaced because schools typically chose possession of certification over experience. Additionally, directors are trying to train students who don’t possess a flexible and a responsive body. Today’s high school students focus all day long on the intellectual and lack the experience to use their whole bodies to communicate. All of these conditions combine to create less than
excellent performances on stage and less than enthusiastic reactions from the audience. Untrained directors usually notice something is wrong, but how to correct the inadequacies eludes them. Some directors choose to focus only on what they can do with their own talents/experiences or what others around them can do well.

Statement of the Problem

The easiest components to focus on when one is not formally trained in drama/theatre are the external elements. Rather than a balanced approach to the elements, inexperienced directors focus time and energy on the areas accomplishable, especially when other qualified professionals aid the director in such areas as set design, set construction, music, props, costumes and organization. Performances conclude as product-based spectacles because directors focus on the elements that can be done efficiently. Often poor choices are made on how to select a show, how to direct the show, and how to train actors. Teachers who direct productions may improve through experience, but significant growth in directing abilities does not occur without specific training. Actors, as well as audience members, seem to accept what high schools present as “the best they can do—given the circumstances and limitations.” Young actors get through a show, but don’t learn the tools of their craft. Since actors lack believability and authenticity, lines are spoken accurately from stage, though not brought to life—never truly reaching or affecting the audience. Audiences may increase in number and enjoy performances more, yet a sensitive director notices the audience is only pleasantly distracted watching their children on stage. Ideally, even the most inexperienced directors
aren’t satisfied with this courteous acceptance and desire change, reaching out for options to make transformation occur.

Desire to Improve

Some directors might find a niche directing product-based shows, but other directors notice that the “spark” of life is missing from a show, the cast is not practicing their craft and audiences leave unaffected. When these directors also recognize directing skills have been developed as much as they are going to be by trial and error, they accept the fact that further training and schooling is necessary to ensure developing as a director. In Ohio, there are limited options available to full-time teachers to learn the craft of directing. One can travel to New York or another out-of-state college; however, most high school educators aren’t in a position to make this a viable option. There are a few community theatre offerings, but these cannot substitute for a carefully constructed curriculum at the university level. Fortunately, The University of Akron started a unique program where teachers can earn a Master’s degree in Theatre over several summers. The first summer session began in 2002, accepting enthusiastic and sensitive directors from across the state, desiring training, knowledge, and mastery in their chosen field. The course offerings for The University of Akron’s Modular Masters Program are designed to fit the educators’ school-year schedule and to address the needs of directors responsible for teaching performers and teachers responsible for teaching drama. The requirements are well thought out and provide students with a thorough background in the areas of theatre history, dramatic literature, acting skills, set design and directing. Participating in classes with colleagues in the field of theatre is another important aspect of the program.
Possibly the most important byproduct of the program is that teachers and directors learn how to defend their programs and the craft of theatre. It is crucial to the survival of the art form that theatre advocates can articulate the need for theatre in the community and the advantages a theatre program can afford young people. For example, theatre can encourage diversity and exploration of the human experience. It can also provide opportunities to develop personal and interpersonal skills, increase confidence, etc. Of course, to truly have an impact, audience/community members must witness and believe that schools aren’t simply doing the best they can, that professionally trained directors are having a noticeable impact on the youth and the audiences by presenting productions that come alive and create a “spark” the audience can’t deny.

Understanding and articulating these benefits is such a powerful part of the program because it affects the modular masters students directly and then allows those teachers and directors to return to their individual circles of influence to impact the lives of students, parents, and audiences. This also mandates that the university staff instruct in a way that matches material and training that is necessary to create this ripple effect of influence across the state. The required courses are broken down into intense five-week summer schedules. The University of Akron website (www.uakron.edu) contains the specific course titles and details for the degree in regards to the Master of Arts in Theatre.

As one of the only programs available in Ohio to prepare teachers to be masters in the area of theatre, it is important that the program gives each candidate the tools, experience and expertise to master the craft. The great actor training innovator, Michael Chekhov, explains why mastery is important with an epigraph attributed to Joseph Jaffer in the introduction to his book, *To the Actor*:
The technique of any art is sometimes apt to dampen, as it were, the spark of inspiration in a mediocre artist; but the same technique in the hands of a master can fan that spark into an unquenchable flame.

High school directors also desire mastery of their craft. They want to return to their schools and create a significant change that will ignite a life-long desire to continually improve the art of performance.

For the aspiring high school teacher and director, an exciting world of experiences, references, and expertise is opened with college-level training. A standardized program of necessary coursework exists to create proficient drama teachers and theatre directors. Students are taught to view directing and acting as legitimate crafts with a noble tradition and with a bright future. Theatre is a living, breathing experience – stimulating to young performers, to audiences who witness student actors reaching their potential and to directors working to perfect their craft. The potential we embrace today correlates directly with the masters of the nineteenth and twentieth century; they envisioned a transformation in what actors are taught, in what audiences witness and feel, and in the impact theatre can have on the world.

Introduction to Acting Techniques

Especially in the learning of acting and directing a hands-on approach is needed. One quickly assimilates material when asked to perform, demonstrate, or create and it becomes clear that another level or kind of ability is necessary. Intellectualizing, staying focused from the neck up, does not equal a quality performance or the skill to exemplify/transfer acting techniques. In fact, it usually limits one’s ability to perform. Students must practice, exercise, collaborate, and perform to ensure they possess the
requisite skills. This full-body approach to actor training is most challenging for “neck-up” students who primarily rely on thought, logic and words, the intellect, to be successful. When mental faculties are such a primary focus, difficulty arises with identifying messages and potential faculties in the rest of the body. These individuals typically lack “body awareness” and grounding. Those practitioners who have honed physical and vocal skills along with the intellect serve as excellent models for their own students.

First Exposure to Michael Chekhov

Acting class is the most difficult for teachers and directors who lack on-stage experience past the high school level. These non-actors may not realize how physically and mentally strenuous stage performing is, especially when one is attempting to learn skills to demonstrate later as a director. Several acting masters from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can help fill the missing pieces in a student’s repertoire of skills. When various techniques, such as those developed by Sanford Meisner, Uta Hagen, Lee Strasberg, Jerzy Grotowski, and Constantine Stanislavsky are presented, discussed, and tried, students can study and then experiment with a variety of acting theories in an attempt to find a match for their own personalities and styles. Once again, the “neck-up” individuals may have difficulty with many of the concepts, finding them hard to grasp and even harder to execute. Fortunately, each student can choose the most effective master to emulate as he/she grows in directing abilities. Michael Chekhov was the specific master I connected with the most and learning his system of actor training has transformed the way I direct. Michael Chekhov’s life and work are interesting, but more
remarkable is the amount of growth an individual can experience through his unique technique. Perhaps Chekhov is correct; theatre will transform into a “theatre of the future” and perhaps the growth of Aristotle’s internal elements in the twenty-first century will finally surpass that of the external dramatic components.
CHAPTER II
RUSSIA’S CONTRIBUTION TO ACTOR TRAINING

Mikhail Chekhov’s technique or method for training actors developed in Russia where nineteenth century artists recognized the need for reforms in acting preparation and methodology. Men such as Mikhail Shchepkin (1788-1863) and his writing partner, Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852), frustrated with the imitation approach to teaching acting, introduced the beginnings of Realism, modeled discipline and dedication to the craft, and preferred an acting style which was based on truthful observation and not cliché conventions. Their theories laid the foundation that Constantine Stainislavsky (1863-1938) and Mikhail Chekhov (1891-1955) would build upon to scaffold the psycho-physical technique known today.

Shchepkin, possibly the actor who exercised the greatest influence on the development of acting as an art in nineteenth century Russia, was known for his sensitive and realistic acting. “He radiated kindness and optimism, and placed his faith in people and progress” (Leach 115). Shchepkin began his life as a serf and worked as an actor to purchase his freedom. In 1823, he joined the Maly Theatre in Moscow. Shchepkin, “…whom many still regard as the greatest Russian actor of all time…died at the age of seventy-five having spent sixty-three of those years on the stage…playing about 600 different roles” (Leach 115-6). His technique of realistic detail required years of study,
training, and persistence to perfect. He frequently commissioned plays to suit his authentic method of artistic transformation.

Gogol believed that Russia needed to embrace its own people in the theatres, from the way characters were brought to life on the page to the way they were brought to life on stage. His writing contributions provided the material for actors desiring a change in performances. Productions of “The Overcoat,” “Diary of a Madman,” and The Inspector General were integral in showcasing the actors’ new approach. Leach, an author of several Russian theatre books, notes that between the years of 1850-1882, The Inspector General was performed approximately two hundred times in Moscow (Leach 162). Leach summarizes that:

>a turning point in the Russian theatre had now been reached. The legacy of the eighteenth century had been fully assimilated and at last outgrown. Major new developments had taken place, and significant plays were now being written. (Leach 103)

Russian critics placed Gogol high on their list of acceptable writers. Since he handled criticism of Russia within acceptable limits, the critics ignored his fascination with the grotesque and mysterious. Gogol’s influence went far beyond the written script. “Gogol developed the notion of psychological probability…he enjoined the actor to go first to the core, the kernel of the character, before concerning himself with the externals…” (Benedetti 1988, 15). Gogol believed the actor should be more concerned with transmitting than presenting. There seemed to be a symbiotic relationship between playwright and actor, especially for professionals such as Shchepkin who believed an actor should get into the skin of a character, identifying with his feelings, thoughts, and motives.
Not only did the Maly come to be known as the House of Shchepkin during his forty years of influence, but today the Maly Theatre’s Drama School, is aptly named after Shchepkin. The current rector, Nikolai Afonin, summarizes how Russians see the progression of ideas on actor training:

He is our forefather. Look what an interesting time link we have here. First there was Mikhail Shchepkin who trained the great actress Glikeriya Fedotova who, in turn, inspired Stanislavsky,…Stanislavsky spent days and nights here at the Maly Theatre absorbing the inimitable mastery of our great actors and bringing to fruition the system of acting we all know so well. (Rusanova 2)

The shift in actor training envisioned by Shchepkin and Gogol greatly influenced the young Stanislavsky who frequented area theatres and was fascinated and inspired by the performances given by Shchepkin-trained actors. In 1881, Stanislavsky studied at a conservatory in Moscow but was disappointed that the school taught only to act by imitation.

Stanislavsky’s business skills made him the natural choice to manage the Alekseiev family business and his family did not approve of acting as a profession. To keep his emerging double life secret, he took the stage name Stanislavsky, a nickname he acquired from admiring the Polish ballerina Stanislavskaia when he was a boy (Leach 24). Ironically, 1887-1888 was exceptionally profitable for the Alekseiev family and Stanislavsky used his family’s money to establish The Society of Art and Literature. This theatre arts school, which opened October 8, 1888, hired Alexandar Fedotov to teach theater. Any inferior acting habits Stanislavsky had learned were unacceptable to the Shchepkin-trained director, Fedotov (Leach 27-30). The marked differences Stanislavsky witnessed in authentic performers encouraged him in his search for new ideas to develop an actor training methodology. Jean Benedetti comments that, “For more than thirty years
Stanislavsky made notes and drafts for his ‘grammar’ or manual on acting. Books were projected, but with the exception of *My Life in Art*, never written” (Benedetti 1982, 50). One reason for this is that Stanislavsky was constantly modifying and revising his concepts as he collected more information. “The Timeline of Russian Influence on Actor Training” (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) illustrates the great innovators and major advancements in performance perspectives and theatre in general. Each innovator seemed to act as a catalyst for the next changes and discoveries being made in theatre.

Other artists, such as playwrights Andrei Bely (1880-1934) and Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) also were influenced by the changes from imitation to realism and added elements of Symbolism to create new dramatic literature for developing realist and symbolist performers. Bely’s trip to study with Rudolf Steiner, from 1910-1916, helped him create *Petersburg*, and the basic foundation for the Symbolist movement. Anton Chekhov’s works, steeped with symbolism, finally found success when put into Stanislavsky’s hands at the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT).

The MAT was co-created by Stanislavsky and Vladimir Danchenko in 1897, after the two had a lengthy discussion on the challenges of actor training. The work done at the MAT would forever change how directors, writers, and actors interacted. “It is important to remember that the role of theatre director as artist and author of the production was only introduced by Stanislavsky in 1898 with the opening of the MAT” (Leach 223). Stanislavsky emphasized that one must rely on what can be created and adjusted between the actor and the director prior to and during the performance rather than on spectacle and mere imitation. He placed importance on the psycho-physical, which he defines as movement with purpose and thought. Through the use of the flexible
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>Mikhail Shchepkin (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>Nikolai Gogol (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>Shchepkin joins Maly Theatre in Moscow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833-1842</td>
<td>Gogol writes &quot;Diary of a Madman&quot; &quot;The Inspector General&quot; &quot;The Overcoat&quot;</td>
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<td>1852</td>
<td>Gogol (d)</td>
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<td>1860</td>
<td>Anton Chekhov (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Rudolf Steiner (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Shchepkin provides 40 years of service and influence – Maly drama school will be named for him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Constantine Alexeyev (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Andrei Bely (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>After watching Shchepkin-trained actors in his youth, Constantine studies @ conservatory in Moscow; taught by imitation; moves to Maly Theatre and funds Society of Art and Literature; hires Alexander Fedotov to teach theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Anton Chekhov has first play, Ivanov, produced</td>
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<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Constantine changes name to Stanislavsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Mikhail Chekhov (b)</td>
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<td>1897</td>
<td>Stanislavsky w/Vladimir Danchenko create Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) *creates psychological realism with Anton Chekhov’s plays</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td>Anton Chekhov writes stage successes The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, Cherry Orchard and Three Sisters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Anton Chekhov (d)</td>
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<td>1906</td>
<td>Stanislavsky begins 'grammar' of acting which will develop through years of study</td>
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<td>1907</td>
<td>M. Chekhov enters Alexei Suvorin Drama School Theatre in Moscow</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Chekhov established as actor @ Maly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bely leaves to study Anthroposophy w/Steiner</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Chekhov makes professional debut @ MAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Bely-influenced by Gogol and Pushkin</td>
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<td></td>
<td>returns to Russia w/Petersburg</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Chekhov @ MAT - impressed with Steiner's disciples who performed private demonstrations of Eurythmy-the science of visible speech Chekhov frequently worked w/local Anthroposophists He opens his own studio in Arbat theatre district of Moscow -invented acting vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Chekhov published</td>
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<td></td>
<td>*blending his actor training w/Eurythmy takes his performances to a new level</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Chekhov meets Steiner on Central European Tour</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Stanislavsky asks Chekhov to direct Second MAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Steiner (d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chekhov demonstrates legendary acting in Bely's Symbolist's novel St. Petersburg One of Stanislavsky's early students travels to America and founds American Lab - Lee Strasburg, Harold Clurman, and Cheryl Crawford start American acting movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Chekhov forced to move - European stage and film star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Continues to work w/Anthroposophy centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Bely (d)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;Moscow Art Players&quot; on Broadway - Stella Adler and Beatrice Straight in audience - Chekhov invited to England</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Stanislavsky (d)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Chekhov Theatre Studio relocated near New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>*disbands in 1942 because of the draft and Chekhov moves to LA - in 9 motion pictures - Academy Award Nomination</td>
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**FIGURE 2.2 TIMELINE OF RUSSIAN THEATRE INFLUENCE II**
and creative body instrument of the performers, the spirit of the play is communicated to
the audience:

Through the correct execution of physical actions, through their logic and
their sequence, one penetrated into the deepest, most complicated feelings
and emotional experiences: reaching the qualities he’d been unsuccessful
at attaining other ways. (Stanislavski 1952, 87)

The psycho-physical is at the core of Stanislavsky’s and Michael Chekhov’s body of
work. Both found an answer to bringing characters to life on stage using similar
techniques. Chekhov did not have the financial security that Stanislavsky did, but he
crafted his own unique approach to actor training.

Michael Chekhov: A Brief History

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Chekhov was born in St. Petersburg in 1891. He changed
his professional name to Michael after his 1928 emigration. He was the nephew of
celebrated playwright Anton Chekhov. Though his famous uncle died when Chekhov
was thirteen, it is possible that he passed on a passion for theatre to his impressionable
young nephew. As early as ten, Chekhov demonstrated a love of constructing elaborate
character sketches. He described how he entertained himself and others as a child:

I took the first piece of clothing I came across, put it on and felt: who I
am. The improvisations were serious or comic, depending on the costume.
No matter what I did, Nanny’s reaction was always the same: she rocked
with her long whistling laughter, which turned to tears. (Chekhov qtd. in
The Drama Review 4)

Chekhov discovered at a young age that he enjoyed performing, bringing characters to
life and the audience’s reaction. With his local teacher’s encouragement, Chekhov
entered Alexei Suvirin Dramatic School. At age nineteen, Boris Glagolin invited
Chekhov to perform with the Maly Theatre in St. Petersburg (Gordon 11). The next year, Chekhov’s aunt arranged for him to meet Stanislavsky. Chekhov related the event:

I was introduced to Stanislavsky in the Mikhailovsky Theatre. “We are pleased to have Anton Pavlovich’s nephew with us,” he said, shaking my hand. I was embarrassed and lowered my gaze. “Read for us Czar Feodor.” I did. “What else can you read?” “Marmaladov’s monologue…” All of which was utterly terrible. “Well, well,” said Stanislavsky, when I had finished, “Congratulations, you are now a member of the Art Theatre.” (Chekhov qtd. in The Drama Review 5)

Stanislavsky made an impression on Chekhov, and by the next year (1912), at the end of the Maly season, Chekhov joined the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT).

Now twenty-one and leaving his youth behind him, Chekhov had a life-altering year when he made his professional debut at the MAT and began his work with Stanislavsky and other teachers he met at the MAT. Stanislavsky trained Chekhov personally in the elements of his developing system—a system he kept secret from the public, strictly forbidding his contemporaries from writing about any of his methodology.

In 1914, playing the role of Caleb in The Cricket on the Hearth, Chekhov got his first international notices and Stanislavsky singled him out as absolutely brilliant (Gordon 7).

In 1915, Chekhov opened his own studio in the Arbat theatre district of Moscow. During World War I, Chekhov became increasingly interested with the effects produced by Rudolf Steiner’s disciples, called Anthroposophists, who performed private demonstrations of eurythmy – the ‘science of visible speech.’ Steiner professed, “Speech is in fact a universal means of expression for the human soul” (Steiner 165). Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy built upon Goethe’s conception of a powerful and capable imagination. Steiner began the new art of eurythmy to renew the spiritual foundations of dance, transforming music and speech into visible movement. He sought to bring science
and its clarity into spiritual endeavors. He believed that the arts, including theatre, were an important aid to spiritual development (Chamberlain 14). During this time Chekhov developed a vocabulary (discussed in Chapter III) based on his profound understanding of how the actor thinks and responds. Chekhov embraced Steiner’s belief that “whoever seeks higher knowledge must create it in himself…instill it in his soul…it cannot be done by study; it can only be done through life” (Steiner 16). Many of Chekhov’s students didn’t embrace the spiritual aspects of Chekhov’s teachings with the same passion he possessed. Though he might start with thirty students in the fall, he often had only three left by December. When Chekhov realized that he was about to lose his studio he betrayed Stanislavsky and published information about the Stanislavsky system. He not only described what went on at the First Studio, but he also attributed some of his own ideas about acting to Stanislavsky.

It would take Stanislavsky two years to forgive Chekhov and invite him back to the MAT. When Chekhov recommitted to his performances at the First Studio, his teachers and audiences noticed something different about his work. In Stanislavsky’s production of The Inspector General, audiences were stunned by Chekhov’s ability to blend the sick and pathological with the flippant. Vakhtanghov, another one of Chekhov’s teachers, whispered to Stanislavsky, “Can this be the same man we see in our Studio every morning?” (Gordon 10).

At this point in his development Chekhov began to wed the inner truth and emotional depth of Stanislavsky’s system with the beauty and spiritual impact of Steiner’s work. Chekhov realized a new technique in actor training was necessary. He passionately investigated acting exercises that used sound and movement in new ways.
As a disciple of anthroposophy he embraced. In 1924, in a general reorganization of the MAT, the First Studio was reconstituted as the more independent Second Moscow Art Theatre with Chekhov as Artistic Director. On the first day of rehearsal he announced, “I can only say if the System of K.S. Stanislavsky is high school, then these exercises are university”—his new position allowed Chekhov’s mental and physical states to improve rapidly—changing from “youthful and indifferent” to “dignified, mature, and ambitious” (Gordon 11).

A year after assuming leadership of the Second Moscow Art Theatre, Chekhov wrote his first autobiography. His work was discussed in published journals and he received recognition and awards. Once more, Chekhov’s success didn’t last, and in the early part of 1927 he performed his last role at the Second MAT. Franc Chamberlain explains, “By 1927 Stalin’s clampdown on experiments in the arts was beginning and Chekhov was accused of being a mystic and a ‘sick’ actor who would spread corruption. Anthroposophy was banned in the Soviet Union and Chekhov was warned he was about to be arrested” (Chamberlain 20). The positive aspect of the censuring was that Chekhov’s autobiography (1928) became an unexpected best seller. The negative impact was that Chekhov dropped his activities with the Second MAT for fear of imprisonment or death.

Chekhov was warned by a friend that he would be detained in the next day or two by the Russian government. That night he left Russia never to return again. He traveled to Germany and around Europe. Chekhov seemed to make a fresh start, immersing himself in the theatres of Europe and in German films. His work once again was well received. Chekhov took this opportunity to expand his training in Steiner’s methods, learning more
about Eurythmy and Speech Formation (Gordon 12). Through specific exercises in meditation, observation and concentration, artistic expression could become a valuable bridge between material and spiritual reality. Steiner’s focus on new skills of spiritual perception including imagination, inspiration, and intuition can be seen in Chekhov’s newly forming acting theories. Chekhov was using these new influences to make creative strides in his own acting, and to make his influence felt in the world of theatre.

In 1935 Chekhov put together a company of exiled Russian actors, billed as the Moscow Arts Players, for a short tour of the U.S. (Chamberlain 25). Chekhov had the fortune of meeting Beatrice Straight during the performances and lectures in New York. Straight, who was sent to the United States in search of a suitable director, gave him an open invitation to Dartington Hall, her family estate in Devonshire, England. Chekhov accepted the invitation, set up his own school, and in 1936 started training the teachers and assistants in the Chekhov Technique. One of his students, Blair Cutting, offered this description:

> Everything we wanted or needed was there – large classrooms and luxurious surroundings. We worked with Chekhov for five hours daily, five days a week. We had Eurythmics for one hour, art classes (drawing and sculpture), and then two-and-one half hours with Chekhov…In class with Chekhov the first hour was concentrated on body work, the second hour we had creative imagination exercises. We went over and over these exercises until they became part of us. Chekhov taught us to radiate energy and the space behind us where inspiration comes. (Cutting qtd. in *The Drama Review* 18)

This depiction helps to envision how Chekhov worked and transmitted his ideas. His early life and experiences helped shape his work into a unique technique. Wherever he worked and with whomever he worked, he distilled the basics of his technique, a
technique that Chekhov firmly believed could make a difference in acting preparation and in developing the craft of theatre.

Chekhov both embraced and rebelled against the theories and practices of Stanislavsky. In the late 1930s, Chekhov immigrated to the United States. The onset of World War II motivated the move. In the United States, he established his own studio, teaching an imagination-based system of acting training. He felt actors could draw personal inspiration from collaboratively setting a scene’s atmosphere, which in turn created the tones of the play. He also established the use of the “Psychological Gesture,” a concept derived from the Symbolist theories of Andrei Bely. The gesture is initially external and physically represents a character’s need or desire. The gesture is then “veiled” and is incorporated more internally, allowing the physical memory to inspire the performance on an unconscious level. Chekhov was interested in answering the question of how to access the unconscious creative center indirectly through exercises that didn’t require intellect.

The focus on exercises makes Chekhov’s work seem physically based, but actually the exercises are meant to lead an actor to a richer internal and spiritual personal life as well as to a more authentic character. The intense personal nature and spirituality of the technique is one reason Chekhov is often referred to as one of the best kept secrets in theatre. Another is that the technique and major exercises do not translate well into a written form. Some even have said that although Chekhov was an excellent actor because of his technique, the technique is not transferable or applicable to other artists. This leads to yet another obstacle: Chekhov’s method can be learned, but the only way to access his technique is from a Chekhov-trained teacher.
Chekhov died in Beverly Hills, California, on September 30, 1955, at the age of sixty-four. Fortunately, before he died he instructed and influenced many performers and acting coaches. Film greats including Marilyn Monroe, Yul Brynner, Clint Eastwood, Gary Cooper, Gregory Peck, and Lloyd Bridges recognized the power in the technique Chekhov used to prepare them as performers. Noted actors Jack Nicholson and Anthony Hopkins, both publicly acknowledged the power of Michael Chekhov’s Psychological Gesture. The front cover of *To The Actor*, includes Clint Eastwood’s remark, “You have to teach yourself to act but Michael Chekhov will give you the necessary tools—and for me, Psychological Gesture and Centers are extremely valuable…They work like a charm. I’ve used them all along and still do” (Chekhov 1953).

Students such as Deidre Hurst du Prey, who transcribed every class from 1936 to 1942, and Mala Powers, who was coached by Chekhov and became the executrix of the Chekhov estate, have provided a crucial bridge between Chekhov’s dream for the “Theatre of the Future” and performers learning this extraordinary actor-director-teacher’s system. The nature of the work requires one to be involved actively and physically in order to learn the technique. Chekhov commented, “That is why I am against the pupil taking notes in class, because it means that they cannot react with their whole being; they can only react with their brains” (Chekhov 2000, 21). Perhaps this is why Chekhov’s technique, in particular, allowed me personally to become more grounded and aware of my body and creativity. I was privileged in 2003 to attend the Michael Chekhov Theatre Institute (MCTI), with the faculty Mala Powers, Lisa Dalton, and Wil Kilroy (Appendix B). This dynamic teaching trio has been teaching together since 1993, and presented a well-planned, interactive, cohesive program (Figure 2.3).
The Michael Chekhov Theatre Institute

The Michael Chekhov Theatre Institute is presented each summer in Maine in an intensive format over eight to nine days. One of the main objectives is to instruct individuals to teach Psychological Gesture, Psychophysical Imagination, Atmospheres, and Characterization. The cultivation of the actor’s spirit is also stressed as an expected area of growth. When I read the questions presented to potential students, I knew this training was exactly what I needed:

Notice your actors disconnected from their feet?
Acting from the shoulders up?
Body and mind in a mismatch?
Are your actors always using the same gestures, tempo, and rhythm?

Classes focused on various aspects of Chekhov’s acting techniques and the application of those techniques to performance, directing, auditioning, and teaching. Each day began with an intense one-hour physical/vocal warm up, and then continued into the afternoon.
with classes on various topics including characterization, psycho-physical exercises, script analysis, and psychological gesture. The eight-day workshop culminated in a “Work-in-Progress Performance” where students applied lessons learned at MCTI.

FIGURE 2.4 OUR TOWN ENSEMBLE —“WORK IN PROGRESS”
An Overview of the Technique

Actors relying on intellect to reach peak performances in their craft must be taught that other techniques exist to achieve their acting goals. Beside composition technique, which makes use of intellect to examine character, there is also intuitive technique and imagination. Chekhov’s technique focuses on imagination. Actors utilize sixteen basic tools to craft a much richer character than the mechanical, “How would I, the actor, be this character?” approach.

Chekhov states that the human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay. The actor must consider his body as an instrument for expressing creative ideas on stage and must strive for the attainment of complete harmony between body and psychology (Chekhov 2002, 1). Chekhov-trained actors undergo a three-pronged development: physical sensitivity to psychological creative impulses, expanded psychology to include how others see the world, and complete obedience of the body and the psychology to the performer.

The Three Basic Acting Requirements

Actors must first develop sensitivity in their bodies to psychological creative impulses. Modern people are focused on material things they are able to see, but this is
not sufficient for actors. Chekhov designed specific psycho-physical exercises that provide a variety of new impulses to actors. Directors then show performers how to use this new input to convert their bodies into heightened receivers/antennae that are sensitive to the subtiest feelings, emotions, and images. This ability allows actors to be creative artists, interpreting the world and offering a unique impression, rather than photographers trying to represent life-as-it-is on stage.

Secondly, the actor must expand his psychology to include how others see the world—trying to experience how others experience life, understanding why others react as they do, or believe as they do; using imagination to consider people through history, across national boundaries, and even one’s enemies. Learning not to criticize or judge sharpens this ability tremendously. As actors experiment with unfamiliar responses, new pathways are paved, allowing ideas to travel through the entire body. The individual develops more choices for future life situations, and as an actor he has a whole new expanded “life menu” to choose the truest embodiment for his character.

The third requirement is complete obedience of the body and the psychology to the actor. When an actor has command of his body and psychology, he’s given the necessary harmony, freedom and self-confidence for his creative activity. All of the psycho-physical exercises teach the actor to move the energy of emotion, desire, and thought through every part of the body outward to the audience. Chekhov synthesizes all these ideas together as he succinctly describes the ultimate goal that begins his technique:

Our aim is to have a wise, sensitive body, obedient to every command of our will. A sensitive instrument by which we can convey our artistic ideas. To do this we must discover the possibilities in our bodies as if for the first time. We must feel that our bodies are new things which we have just been
given, and we must explore and discover them and experience the endless possibilities in them. (Chekhov 2000, 19)

Chekhov Vocabulary

Using Chekhov’s technique requires developing a shared vocabulary between the director and ensemble. Chekhov asserts: “We must create our own language in the theatre…We must not be afraid to use words in a way that would seem strange in the English language” (Chekhov 2000, 30). Some vocabulary and concepts are understood faster than others, but once the director and ensemble both understand the terms, they communicate on a deeper level of meaning about their craft. Following are terms or concepts a director starts with as groundwork for the rest of Chekhov’s technique:

**Ensemble:** The actor’s profession is such that the actor cannot count on being alone on stage. As a rule he is one of a group of people, an ensemble, the members of which must find the right connection with each other in order to establish a constant harmony among themselves. The more sensitive they become, through correct training, the more they depend upon each other for mutual support and inspiration (Chekhov 1991, 121). When people join together to achieve a common goal, in Chekhov’s language, they become “members.” As trust is built, these members learn to play, work, and perform together. Everyone has to make an inner effort to open himself/herself to the others. Then they are ready to receive even subtle impressions from each other and react to them.

**Imagine:** Actors need to be creative artists who are open to descriptions and visualizations. When a director asks an actor to imagine, he/she is wanting the
actor to create a visual image or picture in his/her mind based on specific prompts or suggestions. As members practice with creative exercises, they strengthen their ability to create visual images with their imagination. Also important is the ability to recall these unique images at a later time or in conjunction with other exercises.

**Fly-Back-Over:** The actor needs to appreciate the value of experience. When an actor has completed an exercise or has finished a performance, he/she should spend some time considering what he/she learned from the practice or what effect a specific acting tool had on a performance. How well did I fulfill the image? What did I leave out as I performed? This helps actors appreciate all experiences, positive and negative, because something can be gleaned from each opportunity.

**Circle Exercise:** After actors individually try a concept and decide how to embody it, they need a way to experiment with the technique in a group, but not as a group. Walking in two large circles facing each other, simple dialogue is exchanged as members pass by others walking in the opposite direction. The basic exchange contains something similar to the following dialogue:

```
A: Hello, how are you?
B: Hello, how are you?
A: I’m fine. I didn’t expect to see you here.
B: I didn’t expect to see you either.
A: I’ve missed you.
B: I’ve missed you too.
```
Keep the dialogue free of preconceived interpretation, monotone; allow the line
to be completely controlled by the physical gesture and don’t rely on intellect’s
guess of how the gesture and voice would be affected. Notice “When I do this (for
example, contracting), I get this” or “When I do this (for example, radiating), I get
that.” Focus on one’s own creative expression, honoring the experience, and
experimenting with different sensations. The inner critic or ego resists
experimenting and tries to make one feel perfect as he/she is; however, with
Chekhov, the actor learns to be open to new input and creative adjustment
observing, noting, and creating choices which become tools for later use.

P.O.A.: This is an acronym used to remind members working with new tools to practice,
observe, and apply what’s learned to future acting. This means actors practice a
specific physical movement for five minutes, for one minute observe someone or
something else doing/expressing a similar movement for one minute, and then
apply what was learned through the observation for one minute during that same
day. For example, an actor works with contracting his/her physical body for five
minutes. He/she then goes for a walk outside and observes for a minute an elderly
person or some aspect of nature bent over and contracted. Throughout the rest of
that day, the actor works with applying what he/she learned from the observation.

Threshold: When actors are working with certain tools, they are asked to imagine that a
line exists which one crosses to move from a neutral space into an active
performance space. This is similar to feuding siblings drawing a line in a room
or car to designate one’s own space. Directors can start with an actual line of
tape or hula hoop to help actors understand creating imaginary but powerful perceptions of space.

**Energy:** This term originates from Chekhov’s work with yoga and Steiner’s theories. The best way for students to grasp the concept of energy is to demonstrate it. During daily warm-up exercises, have actors stand with legs shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent and feet firmly planted. Then have them swing their right arm in a large circle like a windmill (similar to the action used to throw a ball, but continue all the way around in one fluid motion). Remind students to be careful to rotate only the arm, not the whole body. Actors should start slowly as the director checks postures and corrects movements. Actors then start to spin their right arm faster and faster (keeping feet firmly planted and not leaning forward or backward). Tell actors to move the right arm as fast and as strong as possible. Shout for actors to stop spinning the arm. Ask them, “What do you notice?” Have them compare the right arm to how their left arm feels. Members immediately notice the right arm feels “charged” or “energized.” The energy flow they feel in their right arm is an example of the “body energy” they need to access for their Chekhov work. Now members are ready for more exercises that will develop awareness and sharpen skills using energy.

**Inform:** When members are open to receiving input on characterization from a variety of means, they allow their creative spirit to be influenced from places many cannot fathom. The ability to explain verbally how individuals produce what they do eludes most pupils of the technique. Chekhov’s carefully designed exercises
traverse waters uncharted by the general public. Again, this concept is hard to explain intellectually. It is more effective to let students arrive at their individual understanding from psycho-physical exercises. These discovered insights help shape powerful, unique, and animated characters. The creator is often surprised at how easily and quickly a character is brought to life, especially when compared to the time and effort it takes to craft intellectually a character which may never achieve a life of its own. This is when students being trained with Chekhov’s techniques trade their old inadequate way of “acting like a character on stage” for the powerful and unique, albeit hard to explain, process of Chekhov’s technique. The term “inform” also refers to the process the audience goes through, subconsciously. When an audience member feels he/she knows or can relate to a character on stage, this insight has been transferred from actor to audience almost magically.

**Radiate:** Actors work on sending out an energy message that is perceivable (consciously or unconsciously) by others. Chekhov instructors must be able to radiate in order to show others how to achieve reception by observers. When this tool is mastered, a performer’s powerful presence precedes him/her onto stage and lingers after he/she has exited. Transmitting this energy message is similar to the sensation one feels when he/she is “beaming” after winning a major event. For the receiver, it can feel like the positive charge one senses when the sun shines on him/her.

**Contract:** If to radiate means to send one’s energy outwardly and openly, then to contract is the opposite. Actors practice pulling all energy inward and closing off any
energy moving out into open space. Actors can experiment with contracting one aspect of the body or the whole body.

The Actor’s Kaleidoscope

The Actor’s Kaleidoscope (Figure 3.1) displays the interconnectivity of Chekhov’s work and visually explains why it’s challenging to find a place to start or way to organize the vast amount of tools available to help actors learn their craft. The exercises have been arbitrarily divided, but ultimately all exercises belong to one organism. When the whole organism is realized, the divisions disappear. Actors can ask, “Which tools will I choose to create my character artistically?” The order learned or how they’re blended together in an exercise doesn’t impact the answer. The end goal is to possess a creative tool box into which actors practicing, learning, and mastering their craft can place what is needed to create the best performance. Chekhov purports, “…the idea of each exercise is to create a new person, a new type of actor who’ll be a WHOLE person…developing future abilities of a new type of actor” (Chekhov 2000, 62).

The Actor’s Kaleidoscope shows an array of eight principles and qualities of theatre arts. The names of some of the elements are common to other art forms; but Chekhov carefully crafted unique psycho-physical exercises to assist actors in understanding the basics of art as they apply to their specific craft. Similar to other art forms, after mastering the elements, an artist can choose which to use to create unique, inspiring, and powerful art. A challenge of the Chekhov technique is that instructors must have mastery or at least a working knowledge of all sixteen of the elements, and possess the ability to teach others how to use the tools.
"The idea of each exercise is to create a new type of actor who will be a whole person."
Chekhov

8 Petals = Principles of Theatre
8 Spikes = Qualities of Theatre

FIGURE 3.1 THE ACTOR’S KALEIDOSCOPE
Going From Concept to Experience

The MCTI began the first night with introducing the instructors, meeting the
students, and hearing first-person information on Chekhov presented by his former
student Mala Powers. The night concluded with introducing and playing the ball-toss
exercise. Each day thereafter began in the early morning hours with general physical
exercise. All the participants met with Wil Kilroy in a large, open room of the Student
Union. The first day, Wil explained that we would get a great physical workout but we
would also learn how to workout with our future students. We were instructed to start
with large, full body movements. Instructors need to encourage use of the lower part of
the body, the torso, and other isolated sections of the body where individuals rarely focus.
Wil called out the following guidelines as a model for workshop participants who would
later teach psycho-physical exercises to other performers. The more inexperienced the
performer is, the more these comments need to be repeated throughout the exercises:

Do the largest gestures you can.

Create clear beginning, middle, and end to movement or exercise.

Let the impulse initiate from actor’s center in the chest.

Sustain the ending by allowing created energy to flow after the gesture and
release fully.

Return to neutral.

Tie the experience to the natural and universal flow of life.

Be sensitive for ways to combine concepts.

These beginning guidelines are important groundwork for the actor’s craft. The necessity
of a fit and expressive body for the actor is also accentuated. Directors need to recognize
that according to the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, “nearly half of
American youths aged 12-21 years are not vigorously active on a regular basis.
Additionally, 37% of adults report they are not physically active” (Surgeon General 1-2).
In today’s world, people don’t sufficiently use their bodies, and as a result, muscles grow
weak and unresponsive. Directors should not lose sight of the importance Chekhov
placed on having an in-tune creative instrument. Daily physical and vocal exercising is
integral to Chekhov’s technique. The youth we direct often need help establishing a new
comprehensive and effective exercise plan, below are suggested rules to get the most out
of a physical workout:

There is no one “right” way to do the exercises.
Be safe—do what you can—but push and stretch yourself.
Work from the top of the body to the bottom of the body.
Whatever you do with one side of the body—do with the other.
Play is important—have fun and feel good—keep in the moment.
Chekhov didn’t make-up as much as he observed and noted.
Observe—you are really assembling your own technique.
Honor each experience—choose what works for you.
Recognize the difference/effect between staccato and legato.

A list of physical exercises, presented at MCTI by Wil Kilroy, can be referenced as a
starting place (Appendix K). Music is a pleasant addition to the workout, but one must
consider whether the music matches the exercises in tempo and atmosphere. Developing
an exercise routine is freeing, fun, and necessary if one is to continue with Chekhov’s
scaffolding of concepts.
The Eight Principles of Theatre Arts

The eight principles of theatre arts, visually represented by the petals on The Actor’s Kaleidoscope, are the primary principles actors must learn for the art of acting. In the next section, the principle will be underlined, principle-related activities are italicized if they are titled, and high school application and comments are included for high school directors.

**Ensemble**

From the first time students are joined together for some shared purpose, they are encouraged to start sensing they are a collection of unique creative individuals who share the same performance goal—an ensemble of actors. Specific exercises can be employed to help members feel they know each other and can trust each other. Thus, ultimately, the goal is to help raise the level of each participant’s performance. Chekhov believed this communion between artists would be necessary to reach the theatre of the future. A cast or ensemble, must work, eat, play and experiment together. The idea is not to become a formless mass, but rather to perceive how one fits into the dynamics on stage and become sensitive to any adjustments members make or even subtly suggest. This communion necessitates eye contact, a relationship, and knowledge between all members. It is in this framework members that will take risks on their “work in progress” with everyone actively collaborating to learn and grow. An organic outgrowth of this work is that an audience senses an intimate group interacting on stage as in real life.
Activities to Enhance Ensemble

*Sensory Elements*

1. Find a room and close it off for privacy.

2. Set up tables in a rectangle around the perimeter of the room.

3. On each table, assemble some items actors can experience with five senses.

4. Have the ensemble meet in a different room. Put them into pairs and have one partner blindfold the other. The “seeing” partner then leads the other into the sense room. Trust is built as the seeing partner leads the other around the sensing room and controls the experience. Remind them to play and have fun.

5. When the blindfolded partner is finished with the experience, he is led back into the meeting room. Then the partners switch roles. (While partners quickly discuss initial experience, change the table contents so that the next member is surprised, too).

6. Utilize images and impressions gathered to help inform characterization.

*Angel Walk*

1. This is an intimate ceremony and should be saved until the ensemble has bonded.

2. Pick a smaller, comfortable room and decorate it with string lights and prom type decorations around any theme worked on in process.

3. Send invitations out for students to experience a special evening of appreciating each member’s creative spirit. Don’t give many details.
4. Members should be “awed” at the ambiance of the space. The warmth welcomes them and makes them feel special. Use lightly-scented candles, greenery, artwork, etc.

5. Members create two lines down the center of the room. The director’s assistant asks one of the students to stand at the threshold between the two lines. The assistant whispers to the member something specific that he/she appreciates about that individual’s creative spirit. The member is then asked to walk slowly down the aisle. As each member feels led, individuals step out of line and hug, whisper positive encouragement, say what each appreciates most about the individual, etc. (comments must be honest and focused on creative spirit).

6. At the end of the aisle, the director checks in with the individual, adds what he appreciates most, growth witnessed, etc. and then guides the individual to a place in one of the rows.

7. Caution – some individuals are emotionally overwhelmed and almost fall over at the amount of positive energy radiated at them – members should maintain a close enough distance in case physical support is necessary.

Energizing the Space

1. Once the ensemble is taught how to radiate energy with the staccato—legato exercise (described under Dynamics), they are responsible for working together to energize the room in which they’ll perform.
2. Each member radiates energy in all directions from every pore of the body and spirit, creating a kinesphere of energy and sending it out into the room.

*The Golden Ring*

1. This activity is traditionally saved for right before the performance.

2. The ensemble stands in a circle holding hands. Each member focuses his attention (several seconds) on an individual in the circle and recognizes that individual is radiating love and commitment to the moment and the process. Then the member radiates appreciation and support back and waits (seconds) for the member to receive it and then proceeds to next member.

3. The members take just a few minutes with this process, but it can be powerful.

4. Then the ensemble reaches down in front of themselves and grasps an imaginary, radiating golden ring that circles around the inside of the ensemble. The ring is carefully lifted up, containing the circle of energy flow the ensemble has created; brought up to the waist, the chest, the shoulders; and then, keeping eye contact and synchronizing the motion, the ring is thrust up to the universe.

**High School Application and Comments**

1. Note on the golden ring activity – when the ensemble of *Steel Magnolias* (discussed later) did this exercise before the performance at the Thespian State Conference, the girls had to struggle to raise the golden ring because it was so full of energy. All were amazed.
2. The first investment to make is buying a dozen tossing balls.

There are several ball-toss activities that can be done.

The one for initial group introductions starts with students in a circle, facing individuals they probably don’t know. The director hands a ball to a student who takes the ball, says his name, and any interesting fact about himself, and then throws the ball to another student to continue the process. Later, the activity can be used to see if names are memorized, if lines are memorized, and to demonstrate the importance of eye contact and intention. This last one is done with the director starting one ball around the circle, the student radiates attention to another member, the intended member receives the intention and radiates acceptance back, and then the ball is thrown. Not too challenging, except then the director starts another ball into the circle, then a third, a fourth, etc.

3. Another initial meeting activity utilizes a large ball of yarn. Students stand in circle, the director starts by saying his name and why he’s there. He then holds onto a piece of string and throws the ball of yarn to a student. This creates a line of string between these two people. That student tells his name and why he is there/part played/year/etc., holds onto a piece of the yarn and throws the ball to another student. A second line of yarn is created. When the group is all done, the interesting web pattern created can be discussed and related to the group’s connectedness and necessary ties between each member.

4. Students love these types of activities and enjoy getting to know the other students better. They may not understand the word “ensemble,” but if a
director guides them carefully, it doesn’t take long before they feel a sense of togetherness. When students feel comfortable as a group, they will feel safe to experiment and take some risks. Additionally, there is an increased sense of responsibility to the group and an increased commitment to the process and the performance. Even if a group already knows each other, the activities are interesting and students recognize they are contacting and connecting on a new level.

Concentration

When ensemble members possess a commitment to the process, the materials and their partners, they are focusing their attention on their theatre work and everything that involves. If one has concentration and is focused he/she is usually in character. Fundamentally, this principle suggests where to put your attention. It is the method of contacting and merging with creative spiritual forces or the door by which one can enter into a creative, spiritual world. Actors must train themselves to develop the powers of conscious concentration (Chekhov 2000, 47). This process moves through stages—from using one’s eyes and ears to contact and communicate with physical things and to feel their spirit, to imagining objects from the physical world without actually seeing or hearing them, to finally entering at will the vast world of creative imagination. When working on a production, the actor is taught to first consider the performance space. He/she also needs to recognize that the actor-audience relationship demands conscious effort.
Activities to Enhance Concentration

_Focal Circles_

1. This exercise demonstrates that when one’s focal point is different, the effect will be different. Because it’s difficult for a student to pay attention to the effect when he is performing this exercise, try asking half the class to do the activity and the other half to concentrate on the different effects created, and then switch roles.

2. This exercise is led by the director. Throughout the different circles of focus, the director gives verbal suggestions to the actor.

   1st Circle – spotlight on self – visually imagine a hoop around the body. Keep focus on self and everything happening in your hoop.

   2nd Circle – spotlight on partner – imagine the hoop has enlarged and now includes a partner. Keep focus on the partner and what is happening in your shared circle.

   3rd Circle – spotlight on physical space – what sounds do you hear? Focus on all the elements flowing through your senses.

   4th Circle – spotlight on another space and time – identify a specific space or time and be aware of those unique surroundings.

   5th Circle – spotlight on the Great Beyond – now imagine traveling way out to the universe and see what elements you perceive.
High School Application and Comments

1. Don’t be too abstract with students or use too many words to try and explain the concept. It is better to demonstrate over and over again until they understand. Value repetition and be sensitive to how each exercise is delivered. If they can’t understand what they’re doing, it often seems pointless. For example, show them a finger roll exercise that takes concentration. Repeat it thirty times, if necessary, until they get it.

2. Use simple examples. For instance, look up at the ceiling. Continue focusing your attention upward without saying anything. Soon others will start to look up, wondering what has caught your attention. Discuss. Have one student start counting to one hundred, and then have another student start singing a familiar song, and add more students with different vocal objectives and show that concentration is the focusing of one’s attention on something specific.

3. If students have difficulty imagining the space and energy around them, you can also start with a physical object like hula hoops, for example. The hoops come in handy later with characterization as you ask students to move from their artistic space into an imagined character’s space. Spotlights, lighting only certain parts of the stage and in different sizes of circles, also work effectively.

Imagination

One may notice that when working with Chekhov’s exercises individuals are frequently asked to use and stretch their creative imaginations. Imagination can be
described as a dream state where people possess a force and call on that force to act, feel, etc. When the creative imagination utilizes its potential, inspiring images have a powerful effect on the observer. Unfortunately, daily reasoning can kill one’s imagination. The more one probes issues with an analytical mind, the more silent feelings become, the weaker the will, and the poorer the chances of inspiration (Chekhov 1953, 25). Once again, it is more advantageous to guide students through exercises that will produce the byproduct of an expanded imagination than to analyze and take the concept apart. Most of Chekhov’s work involves synthesizing observations and concepts rather than breaking them into pieces.

Activities to Enhance Imagination

**Colorful Images**

1. Take the basic mirror game where partners face each other and try to copy movements but with a colorful twist which adds a new level of depth.

2. Put the ensemble in two circles, one facing out and one facing in. Partner up with someone from the opposite circle. Start the basic mirror activity, but then have the inside partner express physically how he thinks succulent orange appears, or vibrant royal purple, tranquil turquoise, sickly green, etc. What qualities are suggested and how can the body communicate this? The partner watching this creative transformation imitates it, trying to match all aspects of the expression.
3. The initiator can change as well as the partner, by having members rotate around the circle(s). This allows participants to appreciate a variety of creative imaginations.

*Day at the Beach Imagery*

1. Play relaxing natural sounds of the ocean while conducting this activity.

2. Have members lie comfortably on the floor. Tell them to close their eyes, to not move their bodies physically but in a relaxed state to imagine the things you say. Speak in calm/soothing tones.

3. Begin by describing a hot summer day. Ask students to feel the sun on their skin. Then a cool breeze blows across them. Now have them imagine the sand under their bodies, first as solid support, but then continue investigating the sand’s other qualities. Have students focus on their hands and imagine the texture of the sand, the heat of the sand, etc. Next, focus on the toes and ankles, and work up the body (back of legs, lower back, shoulders and head). Feel the whole body contacting the bed of sand. Remind them of the warmth of the sun on the surface of their bodies contrasting with the cool breeze that periodically blows across. Tell them they are relaxed and comfortable. Have them take in a deep breath imagining the smells of the ocean…and let it out. Hear the ebb and flow of the water hitting the shore and match your breathing to the rhythm of the water. Return focus to the body on the bed of warm sand, feeling the weight of the body supported by the solid earth. Now imagine the sand softens and your body gently starts to sink slightly into the grains of the
sand. It surrounds the sides of your body like a warm blanket. Breathe in…breath out…feel the abdomen fill and empty…totally relaxed. Finally, breathe in…gently hold for a few seconds and then gently release, repeat this a couple more times and then remain silent giving members the opportunity to just “be” in this imagined scene. At this point, it is very important to NOT end the activity abruptly. Slowly, bring members back to the current environment. At a faster pace than it was introduced, start to reverse the events of the scene. Members feel the sand, returning to solid form under them. The sun is behind a cloud and it gets cooler. The breeze is almost too cool now and the decision is made to get up in a few minutes. Seagulls and people are heard on the beach as one becomes more aware of beach activity. Have students remain on the ground and stretch out their bodies, feeling refreshed and relaxed. At their own pace, have them slowly stand and stretch.

4. Fly back over the experience and have members discuss activity/reactions.

High School Application and Comments

1. Students enjoy imagination exercises and getting a chance to play.

2. A favorite activity is “Creative Commercials.”
   A. Gather a box of random items.
   B. Put students into groups and have each group choose an item.
   C. Explain the rules – groups have five minutes to create a commercial that advertises the item. Each group must tell what the item is called,
what its purpose is, how much it costs, how to get it and why the audience needs it.

D. The catch—the item cannot be used as it is traditionally used.

E. This activity can be varied by giving the group several minutes to list all the creatively different ways it could be used.

F. One group picked a license plate as their item. Their commercial was called “Buns of Steel” and one of the students wearing shorts and sweatpants, tucked the plate in his sweats. The other group members talked with accents and described the easy way to have a rear like steel…the model tapping on the license plate for effect. Then the group had a “mad minute” to tell all of the many uses of the item.

G. This activity also teaches members to play and take risks, building the sense of a cohesive ensemble.

H. Be clear on ground rules from the beginning, like school appropriateness.

Atmosphere

The atmosphere in simple terms is the place plus the event. Most people are probably subconsciously aware of different atmospheres they experience, but don’t usually think about examining, contemplating, or creating atmospheres. Once actors start to experiment with the overall atmosphere, personal atmosphere and related sensations, they also start to realize the potential that atmosphere embodies, which is to give them inspiration and create a strong bond with the spectators. A powerful atmosphere on stage
doesn’t allow audience members to stay aloof; it draws them in and they become part of the action with the ensemble. Actors are then able to go beyond the audience’s intellectual reactions and reach feelings and emotions. A “true chord” is struck and the audience can’t help but resonate with a similar vibration. Once the connection power of this principle is felt, performers hunger for thorough understanding and skill using this tool. Chekhov stated it this way: “The idea of a play produced on stage is its spirit; its atmosphere is its soul; and all that is visible and audible is its body” (Chekhov 1953, 47).

Exercises develop awareness that the space around people contains an atmosphere that arouses impulses and feelings as it urges all to act in harmony with it. Yet it also must be clarified that there is a distinction between the individual feelings of the characters, called mood, and the atmospheres of the scene. As performers train and become more sensitive to sensing atmospheres, they need to keep this distinction clear. For example, a funeral has its own atmosphere and everyone acts in harmony with it, but that doesn’t mean that every individual is having the same reaction to the event. One might be feeling relief, one might be feeling emptiness, one might be feeling obligatory, and one might be feeling happiness. Individually and cooperatively people create atmospheres. Atmosphere is something which fills and penetrates the room like light or air. Members must get in touch with the atmosphere, keep it, radiate it, and then move and speak within it.

Activities to Enhance Atmospheres

1. Have performers rehearse in different places with a variety of atmospheres.

Try practicing in the main office school, the cafeteria, the gym or a small classroom, for example. What changes? What remains the same?
2. Work with the idea that space is filled with molecules. Play music and try to recognize how the actor is part of a particular atmosphere. Make abstract movements (rather than dancing to the beat) that seem to reflect impressions. Then do the same with the director describing a particular atmosphere and have members react. It can help to have some members harmonizing with the atmosphere and some witnessing the atmosphere. With a gentle touch on the shoulder by the director, the witness can actively join the other members representing a molecule of a particular atmosphere.

High School Application and Comments

1. One ensemble listened to the soundtrack of *City of Angels*. Members were instructed to move abstractly to the different types of songs. After the exercise, members flew back over it and identified which song, if any, represented the personal atmosphere of the character they were developing for a play. All but one were able to identify a matching song and explain their rationale.

2. Students do well with atmospheres they are familiar with as a starting point. For example, tell the students to imagine they are celebrating New Year’s Eve at a loud party. After the atmosphere has been established, pull a student aside and instruct him to enter the party with a different personal atmosphere. Tell him to imagine one of his friends was just killed in an accident and he has to make the announcement at the party. Send him into the
existing party atmosphere. What happens? What effect does this drastically different personal atmosphere have on the group?

3. As students witness the power of this principle, they want to experiment with it often to sharpen their skills. A common byproduct is that students start to realize they’re sensing atmospheres in real life. Encourage these observations and help students use their growing awareness to help develop their acting tools.

4. Once students have a firm sense of atmosphere, the director can assist them in finding and setting the atmosphere of the play. When everyone is clear on the play’s atmosphere, they can work together to create it. How does each character behave in that atmosphere? How does each character personally affect that atmosphere?

Expand and Contract

The importance Chekhov placed on universal flow is evident his principles of expand and contract. Start with a basic expanding and contracting exercise. Have students begin by focusing their attention on their breath and noticing how their bodies expand and contact. Next, let students play with the simple idea of contraction by giving actors images to visualize such as cocoons, seeds, hard and cold metal, and the dark earth. Students physically contract into the smallest fetal position on the floor. Then as students start to rise and stretch to the highest point they can reach, they open and expand out into space like a huge tree full of light and warmth. These steps are meant as beginning guidelines. The effectiveness or impact the exercise creates depends on how well the
director confidently presents and creatively guides the group. It is important that the
director remains aware and observant of how individuals and the group experiment so
adjustments and suggestions can be made. Additionally, the sense of ensemble is
reinforced and by learning together the experience is heightened. Some students will find
that these exercises take them out of their comfort zone and they will need
encouragement to stretch beyond their challenges. Chekhov’s tools can be considered
transformational. However, high school directors should make it clear that the exercises’
purpose is not personal therapy, but the training of a technique. Harold Clurman, a
director and writer, put it this way, “The system is a technique, it is not an end in itself.
Nor is it a theory. It exists and has value only in practice, in the work of the actor, the
director, the company” (Clurman 147).

Activities to Enhance Expand and Contract

1. Often this activity starts off mechanically. Many students have done similar
exercises where one is told to make himself/herself as small as possible and
then as big as possible. But Chekhov adds so much more. The exercise
teaches students how to connect with an inner energy or inner body. Through
concentration/focus on certain parts of the body (breath production and the
hands are usually the easiest points with which to work) students learn to
ignore habitual thoughts and begin to recognize that something else
exists in them that is aware of their thoughts. This state is also sometimes
called being present, being aware or being awakened.
2. Once the basic exercise has been done a couple of times, students are instructed to contract and then to walk around with that sense continuing to inform their movements. Students start with large gestures and then slowly start to make smaller and smaller gestures while still feeling contracted. Chekhov called this process of going from obvious gestures to more subtle ones “veiling.” As students maintain the smallest gesture possible they add simple sayings such as, “Hello. How are you?” and then notice how the sound/voice differ when one is contracted? Also what happens physically as you contract? How does it feel to remain contracted? Finally, students return concentration to their creative artist center. After a few moments, they repeat the activity this time playing with the principle of expansion.

High School Application and Comments:

1. Because expansion/contraction is such a universal concept, students grasp it quickly. This principle is often taught first in a Chekhov workshop. Remind students to observe examples of expand and contract in nature and in people they see. Point out how children express themselves with large gestures and loud voices, but the elderly are more contracted and use small gestures and quiet voices. Check back on specifics that the students observed and found interesting. They can also keep journals of their observations.

2. This exercise forces a closed or shy individual to leave his/her comfort zone to experiment in uncharted territory. Play with different levels of contracted and expanded to see how it changes your character. Have students
decide how contracted or expanded their characters are. This activity teaches
members to play with the principles, honor each experience and allow that
experience to inform the best choices for their role.

**Movement**

In theatre, the body is the actor’s instrument. To attain ideal artistic movement,
performers must know their instrument, how it works, its parts, and how to use it to its
fullest potential. Actors must know what their bodies are capable of and to do this they
must actively discover possibilities in their own bodies. Directors guide members to
investigate, explore, experience and discover their bodies as if for the first time. A
delicate balance between intellectualizing the theory and focusing on the practical skill
must be maintained. Encourage members to rejoice in the physical faculties they possess;
joy in the use of hands, arms, body, etc. Their bodies should feel full of life, feeling life
flowing throughout the whole being. This is what an actor must be willing to give from
stage—his whole life (Chekhov 2000, 27).

**Activities to Enhance Movement**

1. Before students begin exercises for movement, have them say, “I have a body.
   It is my instrument for conveying my artistic ideas. My body can move, or it
can stand still.” This is repeated over and over again, before, during and after
exercises. To master his craft, the actor must create a firm foundation for his
talent. Possessing a command of his body will provide him with the necessary
self-confidence, freedom and harmony for his creative activity.
2. As students experience different exercises, remind them to make complete movements, in moderate tempo, with sufficient strength. Be cautious. Strength has different qualities. Students might imagine a mother hugging a child. This action has a certain intensity, but the mother isn’t straining her muscles or hurting the child.

3. Members start with broad open movements using their whole body and then experiment with contracted movements. Notice different muscles are awakened when you ask the body to contract. Do different large, distinct, full movements—as though holding, dragging, pushing, lifting, throwing in something in different directions, etc. Let these sensations sink in and feel the change in the amount of freedom and life coursing through one’s instrument.

High School Application and Comments

1. The majority of students perceives their bodies in negative ways. Mass media and advertising bombard youth all day with some imagined ideal body. The student examines his/her own body and notices how it doesn’t match the ideal: he/she is too skinny, too fat, too short, too clumsy, etc. It is rare that a student has practiced appreciating and loving his body/body image. In modern American culture, students do not sufficiently use their bodies. Underused muscles grow weak, insensitive and inflexible. These muscles must be reactivated and made responsive. Try using computer terms to talk to students: right now the muscles of your body are “off line” and the exercises
and increased mental awareness of their bodies help bring them “back on line” – usable/ accessible.

2. One of the best ways for students to understand using whole-body physical faculties to enliven a role is to take them to watch experienced performers embodying the qualities discussed. At the Thespian State Conference, the ensemble watched an excellent presentation of *A Servant of Two Masters*. This commedia dell’arte classic was directed by Firestone High School instructor Mark Zimmerman. All were amazed by the protagonist’s transformation of his instrument into a creative, expressive, living being on stage. The performance demonstrated how the artistic ideal looks/feels from the audience’s perspective. A distinct energy transfer is felt when an actor pulls audience members in with concentrated energy radiating out through his whole body.

### Gestures

Gestures are a useful tool for actors to express where a character’s will resides and to communicate the character to the audience. Harold Clurman clarifies this:

> The prime element, the motive power of acting, the entire System, is based on action. By action Stanislavsky meant not only psychological action—the desire which prompts us to act—but the physical steps through which the desire may be aroused and fulfilled (Clurman 152)

If a member doesn’t feel he/she quite embodies all he/she desires, have him/her keep working and “fake it till he/she makes it” or “act until it’s fact.” It’s important for members to understand that this is a process that takes time to perfect, a whole life in
fact. When they lack experience, it’s okay to fake it, initially. If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, audiences will believe it’s a duck. After members have experienced movement, the next step is to use repeated, strong, distinct gestures to inform the will of the character. Chekhov explains it this way:

So we say the **strength** of the movement stirs our will power in general; the **kind** of movement awakens in us a definite corresponding **desire**, the quality of the same movement conjures up our **feelings**. Let us call them *Psychological Gestures* (PGs), because their aim is to influence, stir, mold, and attune your whole inner life to its artistic aims and purposes (Chekhov 1953, 66).

The idea of PGs is at the crux of Chekhov’s technique. It is through experimenting and investigating different gestures that the literary character is brought to life by theatrical art. By discovering what fits the character and what does not, the essence or spine of the character is realized. This is just the initial sketch, however, and as the actor develops the part he will rely on the scaffolding for the overall form, but will adjust the finer features as he/she works. Sometimes it helps to have members choose a particular line from the play that strongly attaches to their character. Once the overall PG is decided, students can experiment, fine tuning it if you will, by saying a line, making slight physical changes, and noticing the effects. Similar to tuning a radio: one first selects the channel of music that fits his/her taste, and then he/she focuses on removing all static to receive it as clearly as possible.

Activities to Enhance Gestures

1. Mastery of communication through gestures takes many exercises, examples, and encouragement. But don’t forget the effectiveness of play. Often when
one doesn’t realize he/she is learning, he/she allows his/her intellect to move to the background and let the imagination take the foreground. A wise director will be able to pull from the play experience many lessons.

2. Four basic gestures to start with are push, pull, smash and lift. Caution students to remain neutral in mindset rather than jumping to the idea that the gesture “smash” is negative and involves anger. Stress the various conditions a gesture must meet to be a quality gesture: PGs, as archetypal gestures, must occupy the whole body, psychology and soul—entirely; they must be strong with a sense of intensity; they must be as simple as possible; they must have clear and definite form; and must be sensitive to tempo.

High School Application and Comments

1. One can begin the concept of gestures with a simple demonstration. Make a cute drawing of a smiling teddy bear. Ask students to guess the bear’s will, feelings, desires. Next, show students the same bear but frowning. Now discuss observed sensations. Expand the exercise as far as you desire and then ask this question: Does this drawing actually possess feelings? No, should be the response. Consider how it can make us suppose or feel anything? For example, how does the ensemble feel when you tear the paper in half? Likewise, students can do certain things with their bodies and faces that impact an audience. Somehow, this simple demonstration helps inexperienced artists feel comfortable starting from wherever they find themselves and encourages them to understand and use the powerful tool of gestures.
2. Inexperienced performers might question how one knows if he is right or accurate in his choices for his character. This is a director’s opportunity to give the artist creative license for his creation—if it feels right for the artist, it’s the right place to start, as long as it meets the general conditions of a quality gesture (discussed above). Students need to be reminded though that directors may make suggestions and that this process is dynamic and growing rather than static and unchanging. Also remind them it takes a symphony of people, an ensemble, to create together a complete scene.

Characterization

Characterization involves working with images and embodying the physicality of a character. Using exercises and activities, a cornucopia of imaginative living characters are at a member’s disposal for immediate use as well as future use. At MCTI, the directors asked us to visualize building a “Chekhov Closet of Characters.” As we executed certain exercises, we naturally and easily developed imaginative and entertaining characters. These characters were then named and investigated. When we were finished with the creation, we opened the Chekhov Closet of Characters, visualized putting the character on a hanger and storing him/her/it away for future reference or resurrection. This added a sense of accomplishment to our playing and we definitely felt the power of creative imagination as we witnessed its living byproducts from each other. After “storing away creations” a few times, one begins to see a pattern of origination coming from somewhere other than the intellect. This is a transformational moment as one realizes, “Hey, I didn’t think that character into existence, in fact it somehow just
arrived...from where? How did I do that?” This thought process exemplifies the light-bulb effect some members experience as they exercise their unique, often infrequently-used, creative spirit and are amazed at the creations it can give birth to as one taps into it. The main transformational tools for characterization are: images, moveable centers, imaginary body and voice and the four qualities (molding, floating/flowing, flying, and radiating discussed in the next section).

Activities to Enhance Characterization

Moveable Centers

1. Start with members identifying their individual ideal artistic centers. This becomes the member’s neutral position. Have students walk around the room in a neutral position. How does it feel? Loosen up the body, continue walking and experiencing energy radiating from your creative artist at your center/core. From this confident center, move the center to a “jelly belly.” What changes do you notice? Walk as this character, breathe as this character, play with a voice for this character, say a line and notice the effects. Return to the neutral position and continue walking. Now imagine the center of energy being a metal point at the end of your nose. All energy is focused and radiating from here. Do you sense it? What changes do you notice? Again walk as the character, breathe as the character, play with a voice for this character, say a line and notice the effects. Return to neutral position. This process continues with different suggested centers.
Imaginary Body – Creation through Portrait Art

1. Create a pile on the floor or tape to the chalkboard torn-out magazine pages portraying people. Have members look at the array of portraits and choose a picture that attracts their attention. Members then move to an individual creative space to work. Study the portrait. Relax. Visualize this person as a living being. How does he move? What does it feel like inside his body? From within your body, put on the musculature of this individual, or if you prefer, vacuum in new body parts and build the character. Connect with his breath and voice. As you discover his personality, create a leading statement you can repeat. “I love…. or I hate…” Improvise and play individually. Now improvise within a circle or form two lines and have pairs react as they approach each other. How does this person react in social settings to other types of people?

2. Inspiration for this activity can come from portraits, pictures, drawings, etc.

3. If students tire of repetition, add something new. For example, form a line-up of members in character, have the member from the end on the right meet the member from the end on the left. Tell them to improvise a scene where both characters want something completely different to happen? Who will win? Example, one character is a high-powered business woman who is late to a meeting, her objective is to get to the meeting. The other character is a little girl lost in the big city needing help to find her Mommy. Who will win? This exercise forces members to react in the moment as their character faces
unknown stimuli. Members also notice the energy and chemistry between characters.

High School Application and Comments

The following exercise is a favorite for many of my students. I, too, enjoy seeing the transformational effect the activity can have on young performers. Students who were book or intellect-focused, who believed they weren’t creative, beamed with pride at their imaginative and powerful creations. If students want to be the leader occasionally for these and many of the activities, let them try under your supervision. This provides a different perspective and allows students to witness the work from a new angle.

Costume Characters

1. Lay random pieces of clothing in a pile on the floor where each item is distinguishable. Ask members to walk around the clothes in a circle, looking at the items, noticing the variety of qualities, and imagining possibilities for different items. Which pieces create a positive reaction and which pieces are neutral or negative? Tell the ensemble that when you clap your hands, each member can grab one item of clothing. He/She must work with whatever article he/she grabs. Clap. As each member grabs an item, instruct them to find an individual space to play and create. If one can, start by wearing the item as it’s intended to be worn. What other imaginative ways can one use this item? Try as many options as imaginable. Now choose one way to use it to create an imaginary character. Name the character, create a PG, and gather details. After sufficient time has elapsed, put the character in a
circle or line and have members “introduce” their creations. Remind members to keep gestures large and to find a suitable voice for their creation when they speak.

The Eight Qualities of Theatre Arts

The eight qualities are visually represented on The Actor’s Kaleidoscope with spikes that project within the principle petals. The qualities are discussed below in the same manner as the eight principles.

Observation

Actors need to reach a point where they perform in concert. This takes constant observation of the others by each member of the group. The sharper and the more accurate the observation, the better is the result. The value of observation is in the effort to open one’s self to observe one’s partners at all times, strengthening sensitivity toward the whole ensemble.

Observation also applies to noticing nature and input you can receive from examining natural laws. Chekhov sometimes held exercises outside or sent students into nature to examine and learn. He believed nature could inform humans internally as well inform their acting. Often people are out in nature but not paying attention. Attention takes practice and an openness to garner new insights and inspirations from seemingly simple sources. As one works more with nature’s inspirations, he begins to appreciate the power and living energy available there.
Activities to Enhance Observation

1. Give performers five minutes to take a walk outside in the near vicinity. Instruct them to carefully observe nature as they walk. When they return to their seats, have them write down their observations.

2. Tell students to take the same walk and again carefully observe anything new they notice. After they return to their seats, they record what they observed the second time.

3. Tell students to take one last walk. This time have them go the same way, but be open to any other sources that indicate what to look at and what insight to garner from those observations.

High School Application and Comments

*Who’s the Leader?*

1. It is important to move, speak and perform with a sense of unity. Play this game to help students realize this is a skill that needs to be developed.

2. Have students stand in a circle. One student is chosen to go into the hall.

3. The group in the room decides on a leader. The leader chooses a movement and the group tries to do the action in concert. The individual comes back in from the hall. The leader subtly changes the movement and the other members must change quickly with the leader. The individual from the hall tries to guess who is leading and changing the movements.

4. The more observant the group and the more sensitive to making changes, the harder it is to find the leader.
Voice/Speech

Chekhov focused on the two senses of sight and sound. This is why he also found it important for an actor to create a voice for each role. In most of the exercises that involve the formation of character, students are asked to experiment with different voices. It is necessary to find just the right accent, tonal quality, etc. that communicate who the true person is and how he would sound. When Wil Kilroy at MCTI did physical warm-ups he always added a vocal warm-up. As students practice and play with different speech patterns attached to different types of characters, they start to see the value of voice in characterization.

Dynamics

Once the major principles are taught to students and they continue to practice with them, the director can start to discuss the idea of dynamics. Dynamics are an organized way to observe qualities that impact the way the material is received. This concept has several subcategories that can be examined and exercised:

  Radiating and Receiving

  Variety and Polarity

  Physical/Vocal Pursuit of Objective

  Tempo/Rhythm, Staccato/Legato, Rising/Falling, Winning/Losing

  Uses of Pauses—Pacing, Clarity, Intention

  Two Kinds—pause that comes before something

  --pause that comes after a word

  Intensity—Strong objective can “raise the stakes.” What’s the conflict?
Composition

Composition is the staging or the sense of place an ensemble creates. Most cast members initially consider composition or blocking “where the director tells me to go.” With a few simple exercises, members can be responsible for noting composition, adjusting it if necessary and originating it as they become more skilled. The three major laws of composition are TPT: Triplicity, things come in threes, beginning-middle-end; Polarity, the law of opposites, duality, contrast; and Transformation, the law of change.

High School Application and Comments

1. Select portraits of groups. Norman Rockwell illustrations work well. Have students examine the composition in the pictures and then try and recreate a similar composition with ensemble members.

Objective

This particular idea possibly demonstrates more than any other concept the reason why Stanislavsky and Checkov’s work is referred to as psycho-physical. The objective must always be a verb. Stanislavsky expresses in his book Creating a Role, “The actor must learn how to compose a score of lively physical and psychological objectives; to shape his whole score into one all-embracing objective; to strive toward its attainment” (Stanislavski 1988, 80). Chekhov attributes the concept of objective directly to Stanislavsky. He writes the following comment and explanation:

Units and objectives are perhaps Stanislavsky’s most brilliant inventions …they can lead the actor immediately to the very core of the play and the part…the objective is what the character (not the actor) wishes, wants,
desires; it is its goal, aim…All the character’s objectives merge into one over-all objective…the superobjective of the character. (Chekhov 1953, 139)

As a director and an ensemble break the play into units and decide objectives, the actors define verbs for their objectives. These verbs provoke thoughts and feelings which are, in turn, inner challenges to action.

Activities to Enhance Objectives

1. Ask students to consider their roles and to apply the following formula suggested by Satinslavsky: “I want or I wish to do so and so…and then follow the verb expressing the desire, the aim, the goal of the character. For example, I want to persuade, I want to get rid of, or I wish to dominate.

2. Remind students never to use feelings and emotions while defining objectives because feelings and emotions cannot be done. The true objective is based on their (their character’s) will. The feelings and emotions, naturally, accompany their objectives.

Improvisation

When one creates an open and creative environment, the stage becomes the perfect place to try improvisations. The proposed exercises work particularly well with Chekhov’s ideas because they don’t allow students time to think and plan. Student responses are inspired from their artistic centers and give different results than from thinking. Doing improvisations as a group also aids in building an ensemble that embraces and utilizes each member’s creativity.
Four Brothers

In all of Chekhov’s psycho-physical exercises, members are verbally reminded to work with The Four Brothers in Art: a sense of ease, with a sense of form, a sense of beauty, and sense of the whole (from the beginning to the middle to the end). Students learn these qualities by isolating each sense, trying to express it with their whole body and then trying to express the sense with objects like chairs. The exercises start individually in one’s own space but culminate in an ensemble experiment, always done in complete silence throughout the work. Chekhov offers this suggestion to actors:

…try to do everything as if it were a piece of art. That is the way to be a really creative person on the stage…Every movement, every action becomes a creative thing…Do everything as a piece of art…Goethe was permeated with this creative power. When he looked at a flower, he looked at it as if he was creating it. That is the right way to approach our work in theatre. (Chekhov 2000, 31)

Chekhov believed everyone has a creative spirit; it is just that some have it locked away or only use it in limited ways. Instructors need to facilitate opening these locked doors and help individuals achieve a feeling that they are creating with their whole body all of the time. If the creation seems to come from a specific area of the body the actor must note how that affects the outcome.

Activities to Enhance Four Brothers

1. Start by walking with a sense of ease, then move a chair with a sense of ease and then create an ensemble sculpture with chairs and bodies that radiate a sense of ease.

2. Repeat the exercise with the other forms.

3. When done with a playful attitude, members, without thinking, naturally,
quickly, and silently create unique physical appearances that clearly communicate a sense of ease, form, beauty, or whole.

Qualities of Movement

The concept of quality of movement is harder to explain verbally than it is to have students arrive at through exercises that demonstrate it. Students learn that the act of simply crossing a stage can be done with a particular quality that suggests more than just movement. The four main qualities to work with are: to mold, to float (flow), to fly and to radiate. Depending on the role being prepared all movements are more believable when done with a specificity that matches the circumstances of the character.

Activities to Enhance Qualities of Movement

1. Start members imagining solid earth and seeing themselves as artists shaping the space. Use large, abstract gestures involving the whole body. Initially, one is contracted and barely able to move the highly resistant, solid earth. Water starts to enter the image and the space becomes softened and can be molded or slowly sculpted like clay. More water rushes in and dominates the space, changing the sensation from mud to flowing water as members experience skimming or floating, like a lily on a pond with much less resistance from the elements. More water is added and becomes a rushing waterfall, the lily plunges with the force, but as it hits the air instantly starts to fly like a bird. Instruct members to walk with a sense of flight, let eyes fly, all of the body flies around the room until one becomes lightening, air on fire, laser strong.

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using focused, defined movements. The intensity peaks as one experiences the ultimate burst of fire, his entire energy field is now radiating, expanding out into the far reaches of space allowing warm rays of sun to be sent out from the eyes, the chest, the legs. Be sure to send light in all directions to the space behind, to the space in front, to the sky above, to the east, to the west, to the center of the earth.

2. Repeat with long, smooth, legato movement and move through the actions faster and faster until you are making quick, sharp, staccato thrusts always using the whole energized body and sending the energy out in all directions.

3. Stop and be aware of the way the room now feels as bodies have energized the space through the activity, altering the atmosphere from its beginning state, prior to the exercise. Experience the sensation of moving from chaos to stillness which still possesses a great deal of intensity. Appreciate being able to move the heart, the body, the imagination, and the creative spirit.

4. Honor the experience and the interaction with the universe which provides a wealth of inspiration, knowledge, and newly tapped energy traveling across newly created pathways.

High School Application and Comments

*The Tortoise and the Hare*

1. An effective way to show the qualities of movement is to incorporate them into a fun and simple context that each individual most likely knows, the story of the tortoise and the hare. Each of the four qualities is attached to aspects of the story. The turtle exemplifies *molding* (earth, sculpting,
shaping, form, will), the hare initially represents floating/flowing (water, stream, lily pad, feeling) when he is overly confident and then reacts to the turtle’s progress with flying (air, lofty to jet plane, thinking) and finally the triumphant turtle taking his victorious walk radiating (sun, fire, golden rays, spirit, center, ease).

2. Students start walking in a circle. The instructor tells the story, including elements that suggest the qualities, and the students access their visualizing skills to imagine different physical displays that communicate the corresponding qualities.
CHAPTER IV

PREPARING PRODUCTIONS WITH CHEKHOV’S TECHNIQUE

For a director, the value of Chekhov’s technique lies with training actors who are preparing a part for production. Can learning Chekhov’s technique first-hand from a certified instructor translate into a director being able to transfer that technique to his/her cast? The answer is a most definite, “Yes!”

The Copley High School (CHS) productions prior to my participation in MCTI, already witnessed growth in play selection, rehearsal scheduling and planning, set design concepts and play/text study due to training at The University of Akron. Yet, it was observed that the cast still needed more effective actor training. In 2002, the play *The Curious Savage* was performed on the CHS stage. That same year, the International Thespian Society began a pilot program to provide directors with professional feedback. Members of the State Board of the Ohio Chapter of the Educational Theatre Association (ETA) volunteered to observe and critique high school performances. Dan Bobeczko, the ETA’s Northeast Area Representative, was assigned to evaluate our CHS production. I called Mr. Bobeczko and had a lengthy discussion prior to the performance. I explained I was currently enrolled in a theatre master’s program, that I wanted to improve CHS productions and I desired any observations or comments to aid in this desired growth.

After the production, I received a four-page screening response (Appendix F) containing several valuable observations and suggestions for improvement. Finally, I
had some feedback on what I was doing well and where I could improve. I also had a professional evaluator to critique future productions and observe growth. Inexperienced directors need this type of professional relationship that provides immediate, specific and unbiased constructive criticism to appraise the effects of work being attempted.

The next fall, after I attended MCTI, CHS produced *Steel Magnolias*. This play was selected because it was an all-female cast and CHS had never attempted a drama. The drama would be a good vehicle to apply Chekhov characterization and the female actors at CHS had proven to be more reliable, more experienced, and more open to challenges than the males. Six females were cast along with two alternates/understudies since CHS was being screened and hoping to be selected for state performance.

Because of continued work on developing directorial skills at The University of Akron, the play was effectively researched, themes and ideas developed, initial set design ideas shared, and a professional attitude and presentation followed from auditions through rehearsals. The program creates a network of other theatre professionals to communicate and call upon when needed. For example, Professor Adel Migid gave me helpful resources for rehearsal organization; Professor Susan Speers, raised in the South, came to CHS to talk to the cast about what it meant to be a southern woman; and Dr. Paul Daum and Professor James Slowiak observed CHS performances and offered comments.

My experience with the other elements of drama allowed me to deal with them quickly and efficiently and then move on to the important element of character. Since most of the cast was also in *The Curious Savage*, we started by discussing the challenges addressed in the state screening response. Adding physical exercises at the beginning of
rehearsal was welcomed by all the cast members, most of whom found it difficult to find time in their schedules for exercise. In the initial weeks, I used an easel and large paper pad to write down the rehearsal agenda and the main Chekhov vocabulary introduced, discussed, and practiced. The cast documented their experiences with Chekhov’s exercises in daily logs. The actors chose an atmosphere, determined the theme and began character development. The rehearsals went smoothly and quickly. The actors wanted to continue working with tools they could use for their trade, but they also felt the need to start working with the play.

Using Lisa Dalton’s advice, the cast started with the hardest scene first—the diabetic shock incident. Even with the Chekhov preparation, the scene was challenging. Often the actors wanted to work on another scene, but we continued working until all were happy with an honest and living scene. Now the actors realized the rest of the play was relatively simple, since nothing could be as challenging as the shock scene.

Unfortunately, the short five-week schedule allotted for rehearsal didn’t allow for much exercise work as we approached the matinee date. Plus, our matinee was for the elderly in the community—the people we were trying to embody on stage. This crowd would definitely notice if high school actors were simply trying to act older on stage. Dan Bobeczko would be in the audience critiquing the actors and I was expecting a deeper, character-rich production, too (Figure 4.1)

The cast worked harder than any other cast I’d directed. They were intelligent, open, and as dedicated to raising the level of performance as I was (Appendix H and J). They especially appreciated the professionalism, high expectations and skill training.
FIGURE 4.1 SENIOR CITIZENS AND ACTORS DISCUSS PLAY

The cast answered a post-production questionnaire and provided useful reactions from a high school actor perspective. Actors responded to questions about differences in preparation styles, reaching peak performances, Chekhov exercises and concepts, and other general questions (Appendix D and E). What was the audience reaction to all of this unique preparation using Chekhov’s technique? The audience was impressed. Some of the comments included:

- You meant it when you said raise a level.
- I’d seen the movie, so I didn’t think I’d cry, but I did.
- It was cast well and had great comic timing.
- There was a lot more dialogue, but it was great.
- Forgot I was at a high school performance.
- I felt I was in the room with them.
- They didn’t read lines, they were women having conversations.
- Best play I’ve seen in twelve years at CHS.
- My dad cried, and my dad doesn’t cry.

*Steel Magnolias* was one of nine full-length productions and the only drama to receive a state invitation. The state Thespian conference sponsored by the Ohio
Educational Theatre Association. The conference and brings together high school teachers and students from districts all over the state. Up to 2000 students typically register for this event. Mark A. Zimmerman, a teacher/director at a fine arts magnet school and a part-time theatre instructor at The University of Akron has received six invitations. In Firestone’s Thespian newsletter he states, “It is a distinct honor to be invited. If you get invited to perform at the State Thespian Conference, you know you have done something good.” Thespians attending conference can also participate in a variety of theatre workshops and other activities during the three-day event. Many of my students who attended expressed that this was the first major event they experienced solely focusing on theatre. In addition to the benefits of the conference, the screening process was invaluable.

The screening response was again utilized to make necessary improvements (Appendix G). There was a lot of work involved in storing everything from the fall and planning for the trip in April. We began rehearsal again in March and everything had been maintained: the energy, lines, and characterizations. Sixty-eight schools attended the state conference. Steel Magnolias played in front of the largest audience in the largest auditorium anyone from Copley had ever played. The reaction was positive. The proudest moment came when the production evaluator said that Steel Magnolias was a powerful show and that the character Ouiser was amazing. He made the statement that the actor “embodied Ouiser every second and every inch, head to toe.” My experience with Steel Magnolias demonstrated that the Chekhov technique can be transmitted to a small group of willing performers, but I have also found it transforms any work I do involving youth.
The lasting effect of Chekhov’s work was demonstrated two years later. I was asked by a colleague to observe and comment on a duet’s performance for speech team. Interestingly, one of the girls I had worked with as an alternate for *Steel Magnolias* and the other girl I didn’t know. When they finished, I gave the unfamiliar girl a couple of general comments. However, the girl who had been involved in the Chekhov work received specific advice using our shared vocabulary and experience. She and I could talk in a language that improved her performance in a way that I couldn’t give the other girl.

Finally, the most important aspect of growth using the Chekhov technique is the confidence it gives the director. If he/she is following Chekhov’s guidance, he/she is radiating and communicating non-verbally, just as he/she is asking his/her actors to do. The director is better prepared and has improved skills working with stage craft vocabulary and acting tools. Both the director and the student actors feel the production experience is more worthwhile. The skills learned provide a foundation for creative growth and the contact between actors and audience is stronger with Chekhov’s work. Chekhov’s technique unquestionably improves stage productions, bringing them to a higher level of achievement. The growing doesn’t stop with this success; all involved realize that as theatre artists, they will be a constant student of nature, life and love.

Actors who participated in *Steel Magnolias* left Copley with more skills and understanding of the theatre craft than prior students (Appendix I). One can almost see the confidence in the faces and posture of the actors. The response from the home audiences gave the actors a strong sense of pride on a job truly well done. The experience at the state contest is still talked about when these past students return to visit. The
transformation possible through Chekhov is confirmed in the positive screening response and the state invitation (Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4).

FIGURE 4.2 STEEL MAGNOLIAS ON COLEY STAGE

FIGURE 4.3 STEEL MAGNOLIAS ON STAGE AT STATE
FIGURE 4.4 THE CAST OF *STEEL MAGNOLIAS*
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY

In the 20th century great advancements were made in Aristotle’s external elements of drama. Spectacle, music and diction have evolved to a highly entertaining level; however, performers are calling for the ability to transmit more depth and meaning. Character is the last element to witness a transformation on a universal level and will possibly witness the greatest change and impact of all the elements. Some minor influences occurred in character development before the late 1700s, but the catalyst for major change began in the early 1800s. Russian performers and playwrights cleared the path for all subsequent artists to cross for effective actor training. Artists such as Gogol, Shchepkin, Bely, Stanislavsky, and Anton & Michael Chekhov instigated and inspired major changes: systematic actor training creating a structured method, crafting playwriting material to utilize new acting skills, and developing effective ways to free artists’ unique creative potential. Stanislavsky and his protégé, Michael Chekhov, exerted the greatest influence of all these path-cutters, in their use of psycho-physical skills and tools. Audiences during these masters’ lifetimes sensed the difference as audiences sense the difference today if the technique is used correctly to prepare a believable performance.

Michael Chekhov’s life is an inspiring story in itself. He faced many challenges and yet persevered, giving the world insight and hope for a different future. This small,
quiet and sensitive man left a legacy that still impacts individuals today. It is inspiring when someone who lacks the qualities society dictates he must have to be a success beats the odds, empowers others to continue similar work into the 21st century. Inexperienced and experienced high school directors searching for more effective ways to train young actors of today will find a wealth of observations, theories and exercises to make their search a reality. Chekhov’s technique has transformed my actor training, transformed the plays I direct, and has transformed me personally—from the inside-out.

When individuals question my cast selection or other directing choices, I usually tell them to wait and come to the performance. If, after the performance, they have the same concerns, then I don’t mind listening to their constructive criticism. For me, the proof is in the final presentation of the play. If all of the elements work together and the audience has an authentic positive response, then I must be doing something correctly. With Chekhov, there was definitely a noticeable transformation that my cast experienced and the audience witnessed. The screening and subsequent invitation to perform at State also solidified the fact that indeed we were making strides, particularly in character development. This is what I appreciate most about Chekhov’s teachings—observable progress in student acting and in my directing. Using Chekhov’s technique impacts the outcome of the performance and impacts the actors and the audience. It is a correlative growth. Change on the outside and inside for the actor means similar growth for the audience when the actors strike a “true chord” on stage. Students who have been taught the theatre principles and qualities, graduate high school to influence other performances and theatres. This ultimately creates an exponential growth that will impact the art form.
I’ve mentioned that Chekhov’s work has the innate quality of providing spiritual growth for those who might be ready or searching for it. Fortunately, since I’m a public school teacher, Chekhov deliberately chose not to include religious references in his writings. His exercises allow individuals to experience a shift in consciousness and inner-body awareness as natural byproducts of the work. From a practical viewpoint, Chekhov gives me tools and skills I can confidently present to my students. Not every student experiences a deeper level of understanding, but those who are searching often have their interest piqued. Additionally, students can take these actor-training skills and tools and apply them to life in general.

Also when students are opened to new ideas using Chekhov’s technique, they start to open their minds to other nontraditional ideas. The mainstream is often frightened by what they don’t understand. Some of Chekhov’s theories, like working with universal energy flow or living in the present moment, are not widely accepted now. However, the world is changing and Westerners may one day more fully embrace these theories borrowed from ancient Eastern belief systems. An unprecedented example of this is the combined efforts of Oprah Winfrey and Eckart Tolle. Together they have created the first worldwide web event which teaches a class once a week. The program reaches over 11 million students with participants from over thirty-nine different countries. Students are actively involved in contemplating, questioning, and confirming new ideas and concepts that Tolle presents in his book *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*. Many of Tolle’s ideas echo those of Michael Chekhov. Tolle discusses a shift in awareness. The stopping of incessant thinking and relying on old mind patterns, getting in touch with one’s inner body, establishing a background consciousness that questions
and witnesses, using nature to access the power of the present moment and the possibility of achieving peak performance.

My professional and personal growth and the teachings that have led me along a path of enlightenment are challenging to put into writing. If one is on a similar path and we have a shared knowledge, then discussions and writings are not as difficult. When someone is not on a similar path, then a certain type of knowledge and vocabulary is not shared. Writing in Ohio, my audience is predominately more traditional and not as open to this new age of thinking. All three of my institute instructors began their teaching on the west coast. Chekhov’s ideas were most successful during his last years spent in California. Eckart Tolle, also the author of the *The Power of Now*, had to move from England to America’s west coast to be able to write his groundbreaking book. He comments that the collective energy in California was more open and conducive to new concepts and to more historically Eastern or metaphysical ideas (Oprah.com).

Contemplating the resistance that still exists today, it is easy to appreciate that Chekhov faced difficulties and roadblocks to his powerful work back in the early 1900s. Traditional thinking is hard to penetrate and many are fearful of what they can’t prove or explain.

I’ve come to accept that I’m making an impact by planting seeds or creating small openings with individuals. I’m not responsible for anyone’s transformation except my own. I see my role as one who uses interesting, innovative exercises that often create apparent changes that make some individuals ask questions. It is important to recognize directors don’t have all the answers, but when asked can offer guidance and suggestions. I often recommend books or films that continue to examine similar principles. My
students often recommend works to which I can respond. I make it clear that I am continually learning and often from them. What does all of this have to do with actor training? Before a director decides that Chekhov-based exercises are what he/she wants to learn and add to his/her program, the director needs to recognize the inherent spirituality that may cause students to ask questions. It should be noted that young people are in the midst of a revolution where this type of work may be becoming more acceptable, possibly even essential.

I am excited about the change that society is seeing with the new generation of “millennials”—born between 1977 and 1994. The millennials at 78 million strong are the largest birth cohort in American history. Ann Clurman of the research team Yankelovich Partners, suggests “authenticity, authorship, and autonomy” as the three nouns that describe the emerging millennials, also known as generation Y or the “echo boomers.” The president of Yankelvich, J. Walker Smith, says the millennials will watch over-the-top cultural products like reality TV and the movie Kill Bill, but they stand apart from them and look around for more genuine, less exploitative material (Leo 1-3).

The true power of Chekhov’s technique is that as the actor transforms, the individual transforms. A student of Chekhov begins witnessing that concepts are not only true, but universal. So if they are in a martial arts class working on the flow of energy or centering one’s chi, or reading books such as The Power of Now, Reflections of Love or The 8th Habit, students see similarities with Chekhov’s observations and theories. The student embraces the world more fully but also the world welcomes these distinctly different individuals—who radiate a sense of joy, ease and love; are not quick to judge or criticize; are sensitive to others’ perspectives; and are skilled in creative problem solving.
They maintain a healthy, flexible and responsive body. Gary Zukav, in his book *The Seat of the Soul*, explains it as the explosion of human perception past the five senses. He believes people in society are evolving from five-sensory humans into multi-sensory humans and that all great teachers are multi-sensory humans. Their words awaken within us the recognition of truths. From the perception of the multi-sensory human, we are never alone, and the universe is alive, conscious, intelligent and compassionate. He continues:

> When a multi-sensory personality looks inside itself, it finds a multitude of different currents. Through experience, it learns to distinguish between these currents and to identify the emotional, psychological and physical effects of each…[The soul] is that part of you that understands the impersonal nature of the energy dynamics in which you are involved, that loves without restriction and accepts without judgment. (Zukav 26-30)

Zukav is a perfect example of the new thinker today who is scientific and spiritual at the same time. People who know there is an “invisible” realm that exists in which the origins of our deeper understandings are located. Yes, it is challenging to consider the existence of a realm that is not detectable through the five senses, but can be known, explored, and understood by other human faculties. And what are the implications of this consideration for those of us working in the theatre? These types of questions and thoughts were similar to the ones Chekhov examined. Chekhov then applied his knowledge to actor/individual transformation; however, if an actor is not ready or open to new ideas, he/she may have difficulty exploring some of the concepts, which is where the exercises fit into the learning.
This “evolved” thinking has other benefits besides aiding an actor in his/her training. In fact, I believe this extended perspective is what will make an individual marketable for the new millennium. People will have to stretch themselves and exercise both sides of the brain to grasp the physical, scientific, and proven, as well as the intuitive, creative and unseen. Proficiency can be attained in both left-brain activities and right-brain activities. Dan Pink, in his best-selling book, *A Whole New Mind*, suggests these brain-balanced individuals will be the models in a new society of pattern recognizers and meaning makers. He offers this analogy:

Think of the last 150 years as a three-act drama. Act I was the Industrial Age; Act II, the Information Age; and the curtain is rising on Act III, the Conceptual Age. The main characters now are the creator and the empathizer, whose distinctive ability is mastery of right-brain-directed thinking [in addition to left]. (Pink 49)

Pink continues with six senses essential for the New Era: design, story, symphony, play, empathy and meaning. Current school curriculums aren’t designed to develop these senses, they are locked into teaching skills needed to prepare students for the Industrial and Informational Ages. The twenty-first century is becoming “high concept and high touch.” Chekhov’s technique is a valuable vehicle that educators can use to develop these new, necessary skills and senses.

Three years ago I designed a creative writing course at CHS. I discovered Chekhov’s concepts and tools apply to any class built on imagination, atmosphere, characters, observation and composition. The class does exercises, discusses some of the same topics that Chekhov addresses, and tries to help release the inner creative spirit of each individual. For example, students are assigned a compilation project due at the end of the first nine weeks. The project allows students to choose their own design,
encourages them to tell their story, asks them to play with different senses, requires symphony of many components, typically contains youth empathizing with others, and ultimately is full of meaning if done correctly. Youth respond positively to this type of work that allows them to express themselves creatively and uniquely. Based on all current indicators there will be an increased need for teachers trained to teach students to excel in right and left brain activity. Chekhov’s technique will be useful in demonstrating the skills needed in the dawning Conceptual Age: design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning. Individuals sensitive to nature and diversity, who are enlightened and have replaced the ego with an evolving authentic power—a sense of the boundaries of personality and soul—will be an important part of society.

Another way Chekhov can be used is with students who lack confidence, body awareness, and self-esteem. Small community classes, with certified teachers in Chekhov’s technique, would allow young people to develop a sense of ensemble, imagine different body images, and help prepare them for interacting with the world. Once again there are not many current programs that address these types of exercises or work for individuals. Additionally, public schools have traditionally made challenges for such individuals even more acute.

Our society must prepare for a shift that is projected to occur in the next five to ten years. Having taught in public high schools for the last twenty years, the change is evident to me when I compare working with generation X individuals to working with the Millennials. In my opinion, theatre has been slow in evolving compared to film and other art forms. Films such as the *Peaceful Warrior*, *Coach Cater*, *What the Bleep do We Know*, and *I Love Huckabees* waste no time examining theories similar to Chekhov’s.
These works often raise questions or point to a new way of experiencing our world rather than trying to replace a current belief system. Most of the questions Oprah and Tolle are fielding during their web class deal with people having difficulty reconciling the new spirituality that seems to contradict traditional Western religious teachings. But questions should be seen as opportunities.

From the time of drama’s birth in Aristotle’s ancient Greece to today, the art form has held the roles of reflecting, examining and even instructing culture. Audiences are prepared and ready for new contemplations. Aristotle’s external elements of drama have made great strides, but now it is time for the internal elements of plot, theme, and character to see major growth. As J. Walker Smith reports, this new generation is searching for something more genuine than the exploitive works the industry gives them. New actor training techniques, new playwriting forms, and new ways to access the power of our creative potential will all find a place in the future of theatre.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Websites


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD LETTER

November 24, 2003

Bren Wion
8525 Acadia St., N.W.
Massillon, Ohio 44646

Dear Mr. Wion:

The University of Akron's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) completed a review of the protocol entitled "Implementing the Chekhov Technique into Directing a Play". The IRB application number assigned to this project is 20031121.

The protocol qualified for exemption from IRB review on November 21, 2003. The protocol represented minimal risk to subjects.

If you propose changes to this protocol, an Application for Continuing Review Form must be completed and submitted to the Office of Research Services.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

Sharon McWhorter, Associate Director
Research Services and Sponsored Programs

Cc: Neil Saplenza, Department Chair
James Slowiak, Adviser
Nikki Wiegerson, IRB Vice Chair
Phil Allen, IRB Chair
APPENDIX B

MCTI FACULTY INFORMATION

Workshop Faculty

Mala Powers, actress, author, and lecturer, is in residence and a founder of the Michael Chekhov Drama Group. Mala studied extensively with Michael Chekhov, the great Russian actor-director-screenwriter. She is an acknowledged authority worldwide on the Chekhov technique of acting and is the executor of the Chekhov estate. Mala is on the faculty of the International Michael Chekhov Association and also teaches regularly at various universities throughout the US. She is currently on the board of directors of the Los Angeles Theatre Center.

The following cinema work includes: Cannes de Bergame, Cuatro, City Break, the Sex, City that Never Sleeps, Rape at Dawn, Storm Rider and Ellybe: Gone A-Fishing. Her stage productions include the Broadway production of An Ideal Husband (with Denzel Washington), The Aspern Papers, The Master of Prague, and The Fire Country.

Lisa Dalton, president of the Chekhov Connection, Los Angeles, is a founding member of the Michael Chekhov Studio, USA. West and was awarded: Woman of the Year 2005 by the American Biographical Institute. As a professional acting teacher, she applies Chekhov's techniques of stage as well as contemporary television/film acting, cold reading, and commercial auditioning. Lisa is a noted on-camera producer and director, winning awards at the Houston Worldfest, the American Film Institute’s National Video Festival, and many Hometown USA Awards. Lisa has been a workshop leader for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, the International Theatre Society, the Drama Reed Festival, and the last taught in Moscow, London, Berlin, Paris and New York. She also served as artistic director of the 1998 and 1999 Michael Chekhov Conferences at the Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center. She is the co-producer and directing of the documentary “From Russia to Hollywood.” 2006 Edgar Award winner, actor, choreographer, she included: Picnic, Heath, Prom and Catherynne Almond Crunch Cereal. For more details, visit www.chekhov.org.

Will Kliban, coordinator of the summer theatre programs, is an assistant professor of theatre at the University of Southwestern Maine. Previously, he taught at Santa Monica College in California and was a member of the Michael Chekhov Drama Group, appearing in the productions of Chekhov directed by Elia Kazan. Will’s training includes study at the Michael Chekhov Studio in New York, the American Academy of Dramatic Art, and the National Shakespeare Conservatory. He is a Kennedy Center Scholarship recipient. As a director, Will’s credits range from M spin at Maine’s Snowflower Theatre, to Springtime at New York’s Village Gate, to numerous university productions—three of which were chosen for competition in the American College Theatre Festival.
APPENDIX C

PERMISSION FORM FROM CAST

TO: Steel Magnolias Cast and Alternates
FROM: Mrs. Wion
RE: Masters Permission
DATE: October 3, 2003

In past productions, I have noticed the need for more work on physicality and body movement with the cast. During the Steel Magnolias production I will be working on my Masters Degree in Theatre. I will be implementing Chekhov’s techniques in our rehearsals to hopefully increase believability of characters and emotional transfer from cast to audience. I will be asking each girl to voluntarily partake in this new rehearsal strategy and then to make a few comments on a rehearsal report form. One of my important variables is transfer, how much of the instruction are the girls learning? These forms, which are anonymous, will provide me with valuable insights into the work I’m doing. There is little to no risk for the participants and the participants should add several tools to their craft from the experience.

I will need consent from the parent/guardian AND the student for them to be a participant in my research. Please contact me if you have any questions (330) 837-2946.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Bren Wion

I give permission for my daughter to be involved in the research process for Mrs. Wion’s Masters Thesis at University of Akron.

__________________________  ___________________________  __________________________
(Student Signature)         (Parent/Guardian Signature)   (Date)
APPENDIX D

POST-PRODUCTION RESPONSE SHEET

Your completion of this response sheet marks the end of our work together on *Steel Magnolias*. I want to thank you for the extra time and energy you contributed to helping me understand the director–actor relationship better and the importance of physicality in acting. Please answer the following questions, put this sheet, your purple comment sheet (or whatever notes were on), and your green script in this folder and return to me tomorrow if possible or when you get back from break if you need the extra time. Thanks!

1) If you have participated in past productions, what differences did you notice between past works and this production?
2) Chekhov believed that if you worked on certain exercises you could purposefully achieve a peak performance; what do you think?
3) What exercises do you remember the most? (positive or negative)
4) Of the following concepts, which ones did you grasp, which ones did you only begin to understand, and which ones did you not understand?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetypal Gestures</th>
<th>Four Brothers</th>
<th>Qualities of Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Push</td>
<td>Feeling of Ease</td>
<td>Molding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull</td>
<td>Feeling of Form</td>
<td>Floating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smash</td>
<td>Feeling of Beauty</td>
<td>Radiating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lift</td>
<td>Feeling of the Whole</td>
<td>Flying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Gesture</td>
<td>Expansion/Contraction</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiating/Receiving</td>
<td>Improvisation</td>
<td>Staccato/Legato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensemble</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Character Centers: Thinking, Feeling, Willing. Music Qualities of Movement on Stage

5) Of the concepts above, which was the most valuable/which do you want to learn more about them?
6) What did you think of the warm-up exercises? Do every day? Do before performance?
7) What else can you comment on that might help me understand a) adding physicality to acting b) how to improve actor training in high school? c) creating a believable performance d) anything else you think might be helpful?
APPENDIX E

STUDENT RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

Steel Magnolia Questionnaire
Conducted in November of 2003

1. If you have participated in past productions, what differences did you notice between past works and this production?

   **Allison:** This production was much more professional than past productions. From the very first practices, I felt as though I was not in a high school play. Lines were the biggest surprise. Despite the expected last-minute struggles, it was great for us not to worry about lines at the matinee. The cast was also a nice change, because all the girls were all very ready to work, which was nice. The play itself was also a change. I believe that it required more out of the actresses and that definitely came across to the audience.

   **Deana:** In past productions, we were not able to do as much character development as we did this year. I think that since we had an early start on this production, we were able to explore the world of Chekhov. I liked the acting techniques and I found them most helpful, especially since this was a drama. I think that working without smaller ensemble changed the energy and it was much more obvious when a cast member was not pulling their weight. I enjoyed bringing this production to a different level.

   **Bianca:** N/A, I have not been in any other Copley Performances.

   **Danielle:** I have not participated in past productions, but I have seen past productions, and this one was much different because the audience felt the actors’ energy and could feel off of that.

   **Bethany:** In the production of Steel Magnolia, I noticed that the cast was much more relaxed and confident when opening night arrived. The girls were much more focused and gave off an infectious energy. They also were able to create the “buzz” the performance needed.

2. Chekhov believed that if you worked on certain exercises you could purposefully achieve a peak performance—what do you think?

   **Allison:** After SM, I no longer agree with Chekhov. Although you can truly put effort into a show, a peak performance includes some elements that are out of an actress’ control, namely the audience. I believe a peak performance can only be delivered by the cast when an audience is receptive. A balance of energy must be established; it is essential.
Deana: I think that acting is a skill that must be perfected. The exercises helped to focus, but I think that these exercises would have worked better if we mastered the script first and then worked with Chekhov.

Bianca: I’m not sure what exercises or how Chekhov believed that a peak performance could be purposefully achieved, but when I achieved my peak performance, it was not achieved purposefully, it was a complete surprise. So, in answer to your question, at least in my personal experience, I cannot guarantee a peak performance. I believe it is possible, however, because I did see Dina purposefully achieve a peak performance on Friday night.

Danielle: I think that certain exercises can definitely help one achieve a peak performance. Warm-up exercises are important, because they start the energy flow that is necessary for an actor, and other specific exercise help to keep you focused on performing.

Bethany: I think it would be possible to achieve a peak performance if you practiced certain exercises. What those exercises are, I have yet to discover, but I think it’s possible.

3. What exercises do you remember the most? (positive and negative)

Allison: The “picture frame” or “rock garden” exercises were very helpful in visualizing how you look on stage. The character center may be the most memorable/helpful activity. Finding my character’s center was vital to my performance and this activity was solely responsible.

Deana: I really liked the four brothers because it made me aware of movement. I also liked the “knock three times.” I liked most exercises, but the ones I didn’t like I can’t recall.

Bianca: The exercises I remember the most are the massages, the chicken, the arm swinging and using the clothes to create character. Those were my favorite exercises. My least favorite exercise was the molding, flying, radiating exercise. My favorite exercise of all was the knock three times.

Danielle: The exercises I remember the most were the ones where you put on a character, expanding and contracting, and just fun ensemble activities.

Bethany: I remember doing archetypal gestures and being able to feel the push and the pull. Radiating/receiving I also remember well. It was slightly difficult for me to show that I received, it made me work. I loved the ensemble exercises and trying to connect so well with the other girls that I could predict their movements.

4. Of the following concepts, which ones did you grasp, which ones did you only begin to understand and which ones did you not understand?

Allison: Grasped: qualities of movement (all), psychological gesture, radiating/receiving, atmosphere, and character centers. All of the others were a mix between grasping and not understanding. I attribute this failure to myself, however, because I really only put the effort into developing concepts that would (hopefully) deepen my characterization.

Deana: I was able to grasp most of them, but during the performances, it was hard to incorporate them because we were worried about the set and lines. I tried to incorporate the “thinking” feeling in most of my actions.

Bianca: I understand the archetypal gestures, the feeling of the whole, the feeling of ease, psychological gesture, expansion, contraction, radiating, receiving, improvisation, imagination, staccato, legato, ensemble, objective, atmosphere, character centers, and music qualities of movement on stage. I did not understand feeling of form, feeling of beauty, and the qualities of movement.
Danielle: Exercises which I only began to understand were the archetypal gestures, the qualities of movement, the psychological gesture, radiating/receiving, musical qualities of movement on stage, imagination, and the improvisation. I really never understood the four brothers, probably because it was the hardest exercise in my opinion. Exercises I grasped well were the expansion/contraction, the staccato/legato, ensemble, objective, atmosphere, and the character centers.

Bethany: I did not grasp the four brothers. It did not make sense to me. I really feel like I have grasped the archetypal gestures along with expansion/contraction and staccato. I would like to further study atmosphere and objective. I am intrigued by the qualities of movement and would like to gain a greater understanding of them.

5. Of the concepts above, which was the most valuable/which do what to learn more about?

Allison: Again in my quest for character, I found centers, psych. Gestures, and qualities of movement the most helpful. I would have liked to pursue more ensemble and objective skills.

Deana: I would like to expand on the four brothers more so I could truly incorporate them into performance. These attributes are achieved through focus and I think some nights we lost our focus relatively quickly.

Bianca: I would like to learn more about ensemble, objective, character centers, and music qualities of movement on stage.

Danielle: I think the four brother exercise is very valuable, but I just didn’t understand it completely. I think this is one exercise that will take a long time for me to grasp, but having a feeling of ease, form, beauty, and wholeness is important on stage. Atmosphere and ensemble exercises were great, and I would love to learn more about them, but I think we needed to do more of them, and experiment as a group. The character centers were also very interesting. I now love trying to figure out which type of center different people in my life have!

Bethany: Of all the concepts, I want to learn more about the four brothers. I found atmospheres very valuable and would like to learn more about it as well.

6. What did you think of the warm-up exercises? Do every day? Before performance?

Allison: Warm-up exercises were worthwhile for practices, but as far as performances, I think that actors have their own way of warming up/ preparing.

Deana: I liked the warm-up, but one night we did them before the performance we messed up majorly. I think that the warm-ups made it feel like a mere rehearsal and we focused only as much as in the first few weeks of rehearsal and not as much as we focused for the dress runs.

Bianca: I think warm-up exercises are good before practice to get the actor in-tune with their body and to focus. I do not think warm-up exercises are good before a performance simply because it does not help an actor focus because actors have too many other things on their mind before the performance.

Danielle: I really liked the warm-up exercises!! I think we should have done them every day, before every performance, after breaks, between scenes, and basically every chance we got! Warm-ups help get you energized and yet relaxed and comfortable, and as we got closer to the performance, we forgot to do them sometimes.
Bethany: I liked the warm up exercises; I kind of feel like they should be done every day and especially before a performance. The exercises go the energy flowing and started us on the track for the day.

7. **What else can you comment on that might help one understand a) adding physicality to acting b) how to improve actor training in high school? c) creating a believable performance d) anything else you think might be helpful?**

Allison: Adding physicality-watch yourself act in a mirror (you look different than you feel!) High school actors-I don’t know, but I need help! Believable performance-be conscious of atmosphere and never drop character!

Deana: I think we should have done more activities on improvisation because some of us could not handle situations in which lines were dropped. We needed to run certain scenes w/ideas and free dialogue, just in case lines were forgotten. Although the purple sheets might have been helpful, it was difficult to record each day. When we were only doing run-throughs, commenting was tough since by the end we were all very tired. I think we might have benefited from a general secretary to take/give us minutes at the end of each rehearsal.

Bianca: I think a more intense focus on acting techniques and more time spent on the script would help improve the quality of the performance.

Danielle: To help add physicality to acting, I think actors need to work on exercises more. More time would be needed to do this than we had, but trying to master each exercise in practice would carry over to the performance and therefore make it believable as well. Actors’ training in high school should definitely practice as many exercises as possible, but balancing all that with homework and other activities can be tough! Basically, I think actors’ training in high school should do all that they can to practice exercises and different techniques, even if it is just observing someone’s behavior for a little while. Every little bit helps.

Bethany:
A) I really enjoyed all the more physically active warm ups and exercises. I think it is important to have a basic blocking in a production, but allow some room for the imagination.
B) I know that all of the concepts we studied and practiced have greatly improved my training. I did not realize how complex acting could be. I feel actor training in high school could be improved by just learning concepts developed by directors. I know the concepts we learned greatly helped the cast this production.
C) I think that creating a believable performance starts with creating a believable character. Thus, spending time with your character and understanding them is an important aspect of a believable character.
D) I think Steel Magnolia was a wonderful production. Most of the problems that arose were due to problems with set construction. I just feel that if we have more specific blocking and the set completed earlier, we could improve.
APPENDIX F

CURIOUS SAVAGE SCREENING RESPONSE

Screening Response Form

This form is used by the members of the State Board of the Ohio Chapter of the Educational Theatre Association to facilitate selections of potential featured full-length shows for the annual State Conference. Less a score sheet and more a reaction guideline, the Performance Committee may use this as discussion points for the final selection.

The limited number of featured full-length performances is expected to demonstrate an educational experience, transportability, talent and entertainment.

COMMENTS ONLY

Viewed by Dan Bobeczko, Northeast Ohio Area Representative

*RESPONDER NOTE: Director Bren Wion and I had a lengthy discussion prior to the production. Mrs. Wion is currently involved in a Theatre Master’s Program geared toward directors. Her program and students, all of whom are supported by staff and parents, are ready to be pushed to “the NEXT LEVEL.” My comments, while at times are a bit nit-picky, are merely suggestions geared toward assisting Mrs. Wion per her request.

Using the code below respond to each statement. If the response is “S” or “R” kindly give additional commentary.

A: Always S: Sometimes R: Rarely

Interpretation

1. The production demonstrated consistent directorial control. ALWAYS

2. The director has accurately interpreted the playwright’s intent. ALWAYS

3. The director’s creativity was demonstrated ALWAYS

Tempo & Rhythm

1. The play moved smoothly and the pace contributed to the mood of the play
   SOMETIMES: At times lines were delivered too rapidly on top of each other which made for a fast pace. Setting the scene and establishing characters needs a bit more time, especially in the first act. Cast could work on “listening” to the lines being delivered and “pondering” an answer before delivery.

2. The non-speaking moments were effective in the rhythm and delivery of the play
   SOMETIMES: Again, the idea of “listening” to each other would help the cast utilize the silent and contemplative moments — especially as each character is assisted by Mrs. Savage.

3. Actor picked up all lines and cues SOMETIMES: The whole theme of “listening” would aid in line pick up and/or missed lines.

4. The ensemble demonstrated appropriate energy on stage SOMETIMES: The energy in the final scene was FANTASTIC.
Characterization
1. The characters were consistent verbally and physically SOMETIMES:
   Character habits (flightiness, face shielding, parental concern) were not
   consistent throughout the entire production.
2. Relationships were established between characters ALWAYS
3. Characters demonstrated consistent motivation RARELY: Except for Hannibal,
   characters that did not have lines merely sat and watched the action.
   Hannibal demonstrated extreme consistency in his “cleaning” and conveyed
   his personality very well.
4. Characters demonstrated sufficient depth. SOMETIMES: When high school
   students play older characters it requires major study. Limited life
   experience (16-18 years) is difficult to transition into old characters whose
   “life history” will have a major effect on characterization. Viewing old
   movies, talking with older people/family members, people watching, and even
   interviews would aid in developing characterizations and motivations.
5. Characters demonstrated valid interpretations SOMETIMES: High school
   students tend to fall into the “stereotype” acting when given such characters.
   Character analysis and a creation of a “character life history” will help to
   strengthen interpretation.

Blocking, Composition & Picturization
1. The blocking was interesting and the stage was used effectively SOMETIMES:
   Act 1, Scene 2 has some level difficulties. Several times the cast found
   themselves in straight lines whether all standing or sitting. While the script
   does not create/call for lots of movement, be careful that staging does not
   become static. This will only aid in slowing down the tempo.
2. The best use was made of available resources. ALWAYS
Ensemble
1. The ensemble exhibited teamwork and interaction. SOMETIME: Double casting parts is a good exercise in theatrical training. It helps to create the “illusion of the first time” and keep cast members on their toes in terms of being able to read the situation and react. It can, however, have the reverse effect and cause worry and anticipation within the cast. Team building experiences and projects would be suggested to enhance cast “trust” and better build the emotional responses required by the script.

2. The selection highlighted the troupe’s talent ALWAYS

Lighting
1. The lighting enhanced the overall appearance of the production ALWAYS

2. The lighting cues were on time ALWAYS

3. Lighting helped create the appropriate mood ALWAYS

Scenery
1. Set design supported the play. SOMETIME: The bay window was a wonderful addition adding to the “common room” aspect. The tops of the set with yellow pieces breaking away from the set proper were a bit distracting, but fit in with the “theme” of the play.

2. Set pieces were relevant to the script SOMETIME: Furniture was not exactly in the proposed time period (circa late 1940’s.) Plastic dart boards and certain framed pictures looked a bit out of place.

3. Set appeared to be transportable N/A

Costumes
1. Costume design reflected the intended period. SOMETIME: Time period costuming is very difficult unless one person is designing the entire plot (which is rare in high schools — casts are usually responsible for finding costumes.) A “browns and grays 1940-50’s” was the general plot. Most characters at one point or another in their changes (which by the way were very good with each scene) touched on the theme. “Fairy’s” flower jumper was a bit inconsistent with the theme.

2. Costumes were of a consistent quality ALWAYS

3. Make-up design established the proper characterization ALWAYS

Sound
1. The sound cues were on time ALWAYS

2. Each character could be heard ALWAYS

3. Sounds enhanced the script ALWAYS
Music
1. Music supported the mood of the play ALWAYS
2. Live accompaniment if used had appropriate volume ALWAYS: Given the fact that the piano and violin playing were supposed to be mediocre in the script!

Technical
1. The technical aspects of the production worked together ALWAYS

Choreography
1. Choreography was consistent with the needs of the production N/A
2. Choreography was effective and appropriate N/A

Thank you for inviting me to Copley High School. I enjoyed the performance and the professionalism exhibited by your cast and crew. If you need clarification of, or have any questions about specific comments, please feel free to contact me at [redacted] or at home 216-351-2740.

Wishing you a successful season,
Dan Bobeczko, Northeast Area Representative

This is a pilot program. Feel free to comment about the form.
APPENDIX G

STEEL MAGNOLIAS’ SCREENING RESPONSE

Screening Response Form

This form is used by the members of the State Board of the Ohio Chapter of the Educational Theatre Association to facilitate selections of potential featured full-length shows for the annual State Conference. Less a score sheet and more a reaction guideline, the Performance Committee may use this as discussion points for the final selection. The limited number of featured full-length performances is expected to demonstrate an educational experience, transportability, talent and entertainment.

Using the code below respond to each statement. If the response is “G”, “S” or “R” kindly give additional commentary.

A = Always  G = Generally  S = Sometimes  R = Rarely

**Each category was responded to by two screeners**

*Steel Magnolias* - Copley High School

**Interpretation**

1. The production demonstrated consistent directorial control.
   A – the production had a clear focus which was maintained by the director.

2. The director has accurately interpreted the playwright’s intent.
   A – director stayed very close to playwright’s intent.

3. The director’s creativity was demonstrated
   A – creativity was established with appropriate casting

**Tempo & Rhythm**

1. The play moved smoothly and the pace contributed to the mood of the play
   G - Long scene changes tended to slow the quick pace of the production. When appropriate emotional levels have been reached, a long scene change – even one to denote the passage of time, upsets the flow. The last scene of the play with M’Lynn’s emotional monologue seemed a bit rushed. The emotional level was on one plane instead of the “roller coaster” required leading up to the “HIT THIS!” M’Lynn peaked too early leaving the scene no where to go.

2. The non-speaking moments were effective in the rhythm and delivery of the play
   G - There were few “reflective” or non-speaking moments in the production. In a play with many emotional levels, pauses could have been used to show introspection or personal reflection about the events happening in a given scene.

3. Actor picked up all lines and cues
   G - There was an extremely long and awkward pause while Shelby was getting her nails done. There was a good attempt to add lib by all on stage. This however seemed to shake the actresses for the next few minutes until a comfortable pace returned. The cast did tend to speed through sections of the performance. The cast needed to “listen” to each other before line delivery. There were instances of “non-processing” before emotional lines were delivered. Taking time to listen before a response will not slow down a production if the audience can see the emotional interaction that is taking place.
4. The ensemble demonstrated appropriate energy on stage
   A - The cast worked very well together and expressed good chemistry!

Characterization
1. The characters were consistent verbally and physically
   A - Yes! The southern accents worked very well. Each character had a slightly different interpretation and style, all of which are common in Louisiana (having lived there for 8 years!)

2. Relationships were established between characters
   A - Very good relationships were denoted by actions and emotions. It was very clear to the audience which relationships existed, who they were with, how long they have been, and even to an extent - a brief history of interaction!

3. Characters demonstrated consistent motivation
   A - All characters had reasons for their movements. There was no “filling” going on between lines

4. Characters demonstrated sufficient depth
   G - The characters of Annelle and Claree could be expanded to include more physicality and emotional introspection. While the script gives great lines and history, these characters needed to “become” the characters a bit more.

5. Characters demonstrated valid interpretations
   G - Tru and Shelby were wonderful and consistent! M'Lynn’s intensity came and went during the production - thus affecting here emotional impact on the production. Again - as last year, looking out into the audience during line delivery was inappropriate. Ouiser was consistently crabby! Annelle needs to be more visibly shy in the beginning and gradually work on becoming capable of sarcasm at the end. Claree needs to act older while maintaining a free and youthful outlook on the next chapter of her life.

Blocking, Composition & Visualization
1. The blocking was interesting and the stage was used effectively
   G - Act I, Scene 2 after the announcement of the pregnancy found the entire cast stage left by the front door. The remainder of the scene was played here and made for an awkward “stage picture” while important information was being discussed (why or why not Shelby should do this.) There were also a few times that scenes in the beauty chairs found actresses looking back upstage to deliver their lines. Perhaps looking into imaginary mirrors (toward the audience) and speaking to upstage characters through the reflection would help this problem.

2. The best use was made of available resources
   A - Stage was used very effectively!
Ensemble
1. The ensemble exhibited teamwork and interaction
   A – It was evident that these ladies enjoyed what they were doing!
2. The selection highlighted the troupe’s talent
   A – Yes!

Lighting
1. The lighting enhanced the overall appearance of the production
   A – Yes.
2. The lighting cues were on time
   A – Yes. Christmas scene and tree were very appropriate.
3. Lighting helped create the appropriate mood
   A – Yes.

Scenery
1. Set design supported the play
   A – WONDERFUL – WONDERFUL!!! The two levels was a fantastic idea. It allowed
   for creative blocking and let the audience see all the actresses on stage!
2. Set pieces were relevant to the script
   A – Yes, all the pieces were very good. The set was decorated with GREAT DETAIL! It
   was functional and visually pleasing!
3. Set appeared to be transportable
   A – While quite large and 1 ½ levels, it appears transportable!

Costumes
1. Costume design reflected the intended period
   A – Good representation of the 80’s!
2. Costumes were of a consistent quality
   A – Yes.

3. Make-up design established the proper characterization
   G – Clarie could have looked a bit older.

Sound
1. The sound cues were on time
   G – Gun shot in the first scene was off and perhaps missing?

2. Each characters could be heard
   S – Characters need to project or be assisted with floor mics. Great concentration was spent on line delivery, accents, and blocking – only to be hurt at times by projection problems.

3. Sounds enhanced the script
   G – Gun shots were good and helped the script. The phone, when possible, should ring (or the sound/speakers) close to the phone site and not out in the audience.

Music
1. Music supported the mood of the play
   A – Yes.

2. Live accompaniment if used had appropriate volume
   N/A

Technical
1. The technical aspects of the production worked together
   A – Yes.

Choreography
1. Choreography was consistent with the needs of the production
   NA

2. Choreography was effective and appropriate
   NA

Overall the production was very enjoyable and worthy of an invitation to State Conference. These ladies worked very hard to put on an emotional production. It is evident that improvements are being made in character analysis and development from last year’s season. “Curious Savage” had a wide range of characters and motivations. This year’s production had even deeper characters. Work on character analysis, motivation, and history became evident during this production. Thank you for sharing your talents! Your work with this talented troupe is truly showing. Good luck with future productions and theatrical seasons!

Dan Bobeszku
APPENDIX H

STEEL MAGNOLIAS' CAST LIST

Steel Magnolias Cast List

Truvy Jones           Bianca Caldron*
Annette Dupuy-Desoto  Metra Wright*
Clairee Belcher       Katie Schwartz*
Shelby Eatenton-Latcherie Allison Simmons*
M'Lynn Eatenton       Deana Stein*
Ouiser Boudreaux      Erin Butcher*
DJ Voice              Trevor Burkins

Understudies:
Danielle Marrinucci
Bethany Talley*

Synopsis of Scenes

Time: 1980's
Place: Truvy's Beauty Shop in Louisiana

Act 1
Scene 1: April
Scene 2: December
Intermission

Act 2
Scene 1: June, eighteen months later
Scene 2: November
APPENDIX I

EXAMPLE CAST MEMBER’S AUDITION RESUME

Deana Stein
Actor / Singer / Dancer

314-307-0671
2479 Hark Oak Drive
Arlon, TX 75233 / 809

High German alto
Hair: Eyes: Dark Brown Hazel

THE CURIOUS SAVAGE
ARSenic AND OLD LACE
THE MOUSE TRAP
GUYS AND DOLLS
SEVEN SISTERS
THE SOUND OF MUSIC
SOUTH PACIFIC

THE MATCHMAKER
ARSenic AND OLD LACE
GUYS AND DOLLS

Representative Roles
Mrs. Ethel Savage
Abby Brewster
Mrs. Boyle
General Matilda Cartwright
Klara
Marta von Trapp
Nurse / Islander

Copley High School
Copley High School
Copley High School
Copley High School
Copley High School
Copley High School
Copley High School

Technical Work
Set Construction / Stage Crew
Makeup Crew
Makeup Crew

Copley High School
Copley High School
Copley High School

Training
Voice Lessons
Catherine Robinson / 2½ years
Copley High School
Sharon Hinkle / 2 years

Choir
B J S Syngogue Congregation
Rachel Jackson / 2½ years

Dance
Eleanor Rudick School of Dance
Eleanor Rudick / 5 years
Eleanor Rudick / 6 years

Ballet
Tap

Carnegie Mellon University

Acting
CMU Pre-College
Nona Gerard / 6 weeks

Singing
CMU Pre-College
Stephen Neely / 6 weeks

Audition
CMU Pre-College
Don Wadsworth / 6 weeks

Improvisation
CMU Pre-College
Denise Pulfer / 6 weeks

Directing
CMU Pre-College
Stuart Garden / 6 weeks

Dramatic Literature
CMU Pre-College
Scott Lee DeNier / 6 weeks

Jazz
CMU Pre-College
Renee Keil / 6 weeks

Ballet
CMU Pre-College
Sarah Fairbairn / 6 weeks

Special Skills
English Accent, New York Accent, Irish Accent, French Accent, Mixed European Accent, Western/Southern Accent, Spanish Accent, Move Eyes In Different Directions, Stage Makeup
APPENDIX J

STEEL MAGNOLIAS' REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Schedule</th>
<th>Student Name:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Steel Magnolias</strong></td>
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<td>Monday, September 22</td>
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<td>Monday, October 27</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, October 28</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, October 29</td>
<td>3:15-4:45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, October 30</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, November 3</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<td>Tuesday, November 4</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, November 5</td>
<td>3:15-4:45</td>
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<td>Thursday, November 6</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, November 10</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, November 11</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, November 12</td>
<td>3:15-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, November 13</td>
<td>2:45-5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, November 14</td>
<td>10:00-?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, November 17</td>
<td>2:45 - 5:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, November 18</td>
<td>5:00 – 8:45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, November 19</td>
<td>during school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, November 20</td>
<td>5:30 call</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, November 21</td>
<td>5:30 call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, November 22</td>
<td>5:30 call</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I've read and understood this tentative schedule. I agree to make every reasonable effort to attend rehearsal whenever "called." I understand that excessive absences-excused or otherwise-may result, at the discretion of the director, in my removal from this production. I certify that I have noted above all conflicts to the best of my ability.

(Signature/Date)
APPENDIX K

WIL KILROY’S EXERCISES FOR PHYSICAL FITNESS

Will Kilroy
Department of Theatre

THE ACTOR’S BODY

OBJECTIVE: KINESTHETIC AWARENESS/TOOLS TO USE

To encourage the release of tension and stress and develop ease, flexibility, strength, energized relaxation, focus, concentration, coordination, and confidence.

All students must be personally liable for their safety and well-being while participating in these class exercises. If you have any restrictions please let me know and you will be accommodated.

1. Neck lift-off, look, roll, circle, "chicken/egyptian"
2. Shoulder tensions/elbow/arm/skings
3. Chest/breath expansion/elbows back, arms back
4. Hands/Fingers
5. Reach side to side with stepping
6. Torso swings
7. Rib cage isolation
8. Hips: Front/back/sides/soup/butter churn/climb wall/hump
9. Feet: pike
10. Torso twist/opposite leg/look over shoulder
11. Yoga wheel
12. Salute to the Sun
13. Spinal roll with partner
14. Face/eyes
15. Spinal contraction/unextension
16. Leg stretches
17. Rotator lifts - articulation of lower back
18. Curls: reverse curve
19. Shoulder blades
20. Yoga plow/spinal rock/tricep lifts
21. Kneel to chest/straighten/foot stretch/choose body/breath
22. Push-UPS
23. Yoga: Dog pose/Boat pose
24. Yoga: Cat/ cow
25. Yoga Hinge
26. Yoga Tree/Archer
27. Tai Chi: W’d Horse Tossing Mane
28. Sitzuation

Add: Exploration of Artistic Center and Moveable Centers
Circle Mirror, Voice/Movement Transformation, Body Part Greetings, Costume Relay Race, Four Brothers Utilizing chairs, Body Part Dancing, "Air Ball", "Get the Hockey", Sensory elements, Dancing puppets, Knock 3 times