

Stanislavski – A review

MR. YOUNG

The format of this Podcast

- ▶ Context (not examinable, but very useful)
 - ▶ Timeline
 - ▶ Extremely Brief notes about his past and the history of Naturalism
 - ▶ How he developed the method, and why we care
- ▶ The Method! (the part that is examinable)
 - ▶ Naturalistic Elements
 - ▶ Performance Making skills
 - ▶ Acting Skills
 - ▶ Key things to remember
- ▶ A cute picture of a cat

Timeline

- ▶ 1863 – Born to prosperous, conservative family
- ▶ 1860's and 70's – Childhood and teen years was exposed to lots of culture (he was very interested in circus, ballet, puppetry)
- ▶ 1884 – age 20 – began vocal training at the Moscow Conservatory – it was here where he explored the co-ordination of voice and body. The idea of “physical rhythm and tempo
- ▶ 1885 – briefly studied at Moscow Theatre School – left after two weeks, disappointed with the “theatrical tricks” and “mimic's” that the tutors were teaching

Timeline continued

- ▶ After leaving the Moscow Theatre School, Stanislavski devoted a lot of attention to the Maly Theatre – a theatre that was founded on the ideas of realism and developing an “actor of feeling”
- ▶ It was here where he developed his method, with a focus on:
 - ▶ Ensemble approaches to theatre making
 - ▶ Discipline and focus/concentration
 - ▶ The importance of extensive rehearsals
 - ▶ The careful use of observation and emotion in the craft of acting
- ▶ 1898 – Founded the Moscow Open Theatre (later renamed to Moscow Arts Theatre) began training actors in his method.
- ▶ 1936 – Stanislavski's book “an actor prepares” is published in the USA.
- ▶ 1937 – Stanislavski dies, the night before his book “an Actor Prepares” is published in his home country of Russia.

Stanislavski's legacy

- ▶ Before his method, and the success of his method, actors were not trained with a reverence for the emotional depth of characters.
- ▶ Acting was seen as a physical mimic of outer human voice and movement. Movement was exaggerated and voice work was focused on clarity, and not emotion. Performances were rigid and awkward, compared with what we understand as acting today.
- ▶ His method was the beginning of many other acting methods, and was the beginning of a major movement across western acting and playwriting.

Naturalistic Conventions

- ▶ characters are believable, everyday types
- ▶ costumes are authentic
- ▶ stage settings (locations) and props are often indoors and believable
- ▶ the 'box set' is normally used for realistic dramas on stage, consisting of three walls and an invisible 'fourth wall' facing the audience
- ▶ settings for realistic plays are often bland (deliberately ordinary),
- ▶ dialogue is not heightened for effect, but that of everyday speech (vernacular)
- ▶ the drama is typically psychologically driven, where the plot is secondary and primary focus is placed on the interior lives of characters, their motives, the reactions of others etc.
- ▶ naturalistic plays often see the protagonist (main character) rise up against the odds to assert him/herself against an injustice of some kind.

Performance making skills

- ▶ The Given Circumstances
 - ▶ Characters have rich back stories and histories, understanding this will lead to a richer and more authentic character and performance creation
- ▶ Objectives/Super Objectives
 - ▶ Within a scene, each of your characters has something they want – this may not be resolved after the performance is concluded. This may or may not be a literal object, but sometimes a non-literal person.
- ▶ The Magic If
 - ▶ Also useful when you are making a character, the Magic If asks the actor to put themselves what would they do in that situation?

Acting Skills

- ▶ Muscle Memory
 - ▶ Having an awareness of the conscious and subconscious actions, and how your body reacts to stimulus (for example, a hot or cold room, how your body moves, both in over the top and in subtle ways.
- ▶ Emotion Memory
 - ▶ Using the actors past experience of emotions and of experiences to add authenticity to your performance. Stanislavski had little care for the emotional impact this had on actors, only that he could illicit real life reactions
- ▶ Circles of Attention
 - ▶ Actors were trained to become extremely aware of their surroundings and the surroundings of their characters. Focusing their attention on key objects or of direct spaces learnt an added realism to their performances

Things to remember

- ▶ Play-making is a collaborative process
 - ▶ Stanislavski was quoted as saying "there are no small parts, only small actors". He wanted to break down the idea of the "star" actor and pushed his actors to understand that every role is important and that every actor has equal billing and importance.
- ▶ Concentration and focus is vital to good performance
 - ▶ Stanislavski would run his performers through many relaxation and centring exercises, to allow them the free mind to focus 100% on the authenticity of their performance. He also mandated observation of real people and real interactions to help actors create real theatre

Well done!

