

THE STANISLAVSKI SYSTEM AS IT HAS COME TO BE UNDERSTOOD TODAY

THE AIMS OF THE SYSTEM:

- To make the outward behaviour of the performer - gestures, voice, and movements- natural and convincing.
- To convey objectives-the inner needs of a character. A performance will appear superficial and mechanical without a deep sense of conviction and belief.
- To make the life of the character onstage dynamic AND continuous. To emphasize not only to the high points of a part but the in between parts as well.
- To develop a strong sense of ensemble playing with other performers in a scene.

RELAXATION

- Stanislavski believed that unwanted tension had to be eliminated and that the performer at all times had to attain a state of physical and vocal relaxation. **Relaxation is essential**...it is the foundation of the system

CONCENTRATION and OBSERVATION

- An actor must **concentrate attention** on what is happening on the stage and not be distracted by the presence of the audience. Stanislavski referred to this concentration as the *circle of attention*. When the performer has established a strong *circle of attention*, they can enlarge the circle outward to include the entire stage area. When concentration is lost they must return to centre of their circle.
- An actor must **activate the senses**, particularly by listening attentively and looking directly and consciously.

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES

- A performer must focus on specific concrete details. A performer should never try to act in general amorphous way. The performer must also conceive of the situation in which a character exists (which Stanislavski referred to as the **given circumstances**) in term of specifics. In what kind of space does an event take place: formal, public, domestic? How does it feel? What is the temperature? The lighting? What has gone on just before? What is expected in the moments ahead? Again, those questions must be answered in specific terms.

INNER TRUTH

- **Inner truth** deals with the internal or subjective world of characters - that is, their thoughts and emotions.

The magic 'if'.

The actor knows that the play and the setting are 'unreal', but asks 'How would I behave if they were real?' ...transforming the imaginary world of the play into a real one.

1. Who are you?
2. Where and when are you?
3. What do you want?
4. Why do you want it?
5. How will you get it?
6. Why do you want it now?
7. What will happen if you don't get it?
8. What will happen if you don't get it now?
9. What is in your way?
10. What must you overcome?

- To help the magic "if" an actor needs a **strong imagination**. He must ask himself questions about the part he is playing and in performance fully understand what he says and what he does.
- To bring truth to the portrayal of the character, an actor should draw on their '**emotional memory**'...the store of emotional experiences lying dormant in his subconscious mind.

ONSTAGE ACTION

- **Attention to small physical actions** is paramount...they must be conscious actions not habits. An important principle of Stanislavski's system is that all action onstage must have a purpose. This means that the performer's attention must always be focused on a series of physical actions linked together by the circumstances of the play. Stanislavski determined these actions by asking three essential questions: **What? Why? How?**

SUPER-OBJECTIVE // THROUGH LINE // BEATS

- An actor must use his **intellect** to understand the text of the play. In order to develop a character's continuity, the actor needs to establish the **super-objective** of a character...that is what the character wants during the course of a play? What is the character's driving force? ...from this objective can be developed a **through line**. In order to develop the through line, Stanislavski urged performers to divide scenes into units (sometimes called beats). In each unit there is an objective, and the all these objectives lead ultimately to the super-objective.

ENSEMBLE PLAYING

- Except in one-person shows, performers do not act alone; they interact with other people. Some performers stop acting when they are not speaking. Acting is also reacting.
- An actor does not identify with the character completely. An actor 'lives', weeps and laughs on the stage, but **observes** his laughter and tears.