



400 Words

from Joseph R. D'Ambrosi, graduate student,
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You Must Know Theory to Act

I often find myself debating with other theatre artists, particularly young actors, about the relevancy of acting theory in theatre practice. They argue that the development of acting is a result of "doing theatre" rather than wasting time studying the rarely employed theories of the far-distant past. However, I believe that studying the evolution of acting and applying acting theory to contemporary theatre practice is essential to the growth and further advancement of the craft. Here's why:

At the core, we act to embody the human experience in a way that surpasses the efficiency of the spoken or written word; since human beings have the innate ability to create something from nothing, we make theatre to bring stories to life, to tell the truth. It is the actor's job to communicate

this information from the stage to the audience. But what is the most effective way to do so? Over the last 3,000 years, actors have developed hundreds of theories to answer this loaded question. History shows us that there are many successful methods of acting. Therefore, to know which one works best for your own practice it is imperative to understand the theories that have come before you.

Applying theory to theatre practice leads to the further development of acting technique for modern actors. Sanford Meisner developed his technique after working closely with Lee Strasberg at the Group Theatre in New York. Strasberg's "method" style of acting is highly influenced by the ideas of Konstantin Stanislavsky. These artists developed their ideas using other theo-

ries as building blocks; they expanded on the ideas that worked for them and revised those that did not. Thus, experimenting with existing theories may lead to the foundation of the next big idea in contemporary theatre practice. Who knows? Perhaps your theory will be studied next.

From classical styles of acting to post-modern realism, we owe the theories behind our practice to the many theatre artists who have come before us. I challenge anyone who shares a passion for acting to faithfully study and apply the theories behind the art. This not only honors theatre's history, but it enriches the quality of performance and secures the successful future of the actor. ■

Have an opinion you would like to share on a topic related to theatre? Send your column of 400 words or less to deanna@setc.org.

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