

Introduction

This book is the result of observations that I made within an open journal. These periodic entries were made as I prepared for the role of Richard Burbage in Lauren Gunderson's play, *The Book of Will*.

I taught acting for over 40 years. When I retired, I returned to my first love and began acting at the local theatre. It was a humble experience. I no longer had the vocal range that I once had, I was hearing impaired and was often unable to hear my cues. Also, I often found the basics that I learned when I was a young man alluding me.

Once I started working on *The Book of Will*, all the techniques connected to acting started to rain down on me again. I decided that I would keep a journal so that I would have a record of my preparation process for future reference. As I began my work, I found that my initial notes were too disorganized. The general approach that I was taking wouldn't be useful to me later. I had to be more specific and systematic. So, I began organizing my thoughts the same way that I would organize an acting class.

Each entry is organized around a specific observation that arose while I was working. I addressed how these observations flowed from the basics of acting into the deeper and more personal acting process. Periodically, I posted these

An Actor's Path

observations on a social media page that was frequented by my past students and actors with whom I have worked.

Posting these on a regular basis kept me honest. While the day-to-day process of preparing a role can be messy, posting these observations required me to shape a clear and cogent approach. Talking about the personal process that I go through as an actor was unsettling at first. Revealing the personal choices that I made as an actor created a vulnerable situation that was challenging. If I had simply kept my process to myself, this could have been avoided. However, the work wouldn't have been as meaningful.

In this book, I cite a few classical acting theories. I also relay theatre stories that apply to my observations. I have included a bibliography of as many of the sources that I could recall. After so many years, it's difficult to remember precisely from where much of the inspiration arose. As with most theatre stories, the facts may get blurry. (You won't believe how many different actors to which I've heard attributed the famous quote, "Dying is easy, comedy is hard.") But I believe the most significant sources are properly cited and the mythology of past theatre experiences tell a true tale.

I hope that these observations are taken for what they were meant to be. The discoveries and recollections that arose as an old actor worked through his path to a performance. As you read these observations, let me share an initial observation made by Constantine Stanislavski that applies here: "Create your own method. Don't depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you."

The Journal Begins

I've been lucky enough to have the opportunity to act in an upcoming Flashback Theatre production. As I begin to prepare, I am struck by many nuances that need to be employed but are rarely taught in acting classes. I was going to keep a journal for myself, but it seemed to me that, even though I approach acting from a 20th century viewpoint, there may still be something of value in my observations for others. The first observation is more basic than nuanced but often overlooked.



Uncle Vanya Rehearsal
Steve Cleberg directs
Jenny Denny and Martha Pratt in *Uncle Vanya*, 2024