

Report on Dissertation

First, may I please give my apologies for being behind with my report. My computer was hacked and I lost everything. Further, I have had to sort out the publication of my recent research given that publishers are behind schedules for Covid 19 and lockdowns related reasons.

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Title: Michael Chekhov: from Europe to America; from Stage to Pedagogy.

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It is important to note at the outset that this is an excellent PhD. It is not often that one is invited to review such a high calibre dissertation and to observe the extent of research, discussion and investigative analysis done as is found in the thesis. It meets the generally recognized criteria of contribution to knowledge in the field, originality, rigour, and significance, and it does so in a highly commendable way.

The accuracy, volume and in-depth analysis of the research done is notably intelligent, lucid and coherently articulated. The extent of the bibliography, interviews and comprehensive research completed is to be greatly commended. With such a grounding in detailed and well thought through research, the student is then able to discuss and investigate her chosen focus.

In essence, her focus is:

How did the Chekhov system of acting teaching and pedagogy evolve from the Stanislavsky influenced approach at the MAT when it reached Europe, the UK and America? What are the significant specifics of his approach, theoretically and practically? How does he differ from or contribute to Stanislavsky's groundbreaking theories and develop them? What kind of teaching system could be appropriate today that emerges from Chekhov? What are practical notions and exercises that might support a highly evolved set of mature actor teaching semesters for the student of today?

The core aim is , as the candidate suggests: 'the motive of this study has not simply been to investigate theatre history, but rather to provide resources and new understanding for theatrical scholars, teachers, actors, directors, and their students, who would want to share Chekhov's work and carry his legacy into the 21st Century' (pg 19). This is key to how the candidate has approached Chekhov's acting theory and notions, and how she has astutely structured her dissertation to be a focus on critique and suggested new ways of studying his work, not just a description of the theories.

The student shows her very insightful sense of the methodology appropriate for a PhD: the combination of historical context, analysis, the application of theory to practice, debate, new understandings and, ultimately, a subtle argument for how his work can inspire, theoretically and practically guide scholars, teachers, students and practitioners of today with ideas for the study and learning of acting appropriate to our times.

Emerging from the Moscow Art Theatre, the candidate focuses on Chekhov's notions including: concentration (attention), characterizations, centers, the importance of movement (action), imagination, radiating (a concept well noted in the work of the renowned director Peter Brook), objectives, through-lines, scene analysis, atmospheres, 'will-impulses', and 'the creative function of the Higher Self'. In this context, the student notes that: 'Chekhov made Stanislavsky's method his own and did not simply copy what he had learned at the MAT'. (pg 20).

Importantly, some of the latter consisted of a focus on the actor's imagination rather than mostly on emotional memory, physical sensations rather than primarily emotional inner life, psychophysical exercises to constitute the essence of actor training, the use of images in developing character, and the

very important notion of psychological gesture - the incorporation of images in to actor movement and gesture.

The student also notes the influence that Vakhtangov had on Chekhov, and how his system or theory traversed Europe, the UK and America and Hollywood. In essence, it is important to note that Chekhov's approach profoundly influenced, in particular, the post-war generation of American actors who went on to become actors of international repute and remarkably skilled performers. (The list is included in the dissertation and convincingly researched).

Further, it is not an exaggeration to say that this approach to actor training and performing remains as influential today as it was then in America, the UK and globally. This is particularly evident in the focus on imagination (and all the significant ideas and exercises which it led to) rather than emotional memory, the psychological gesture and how that is achieved, and the psychophysical exercises Chekhov elucidated.

In my report I also want to mention that the student has done extremely impressive and comprehensive research into Chekhov's life, his lectures, notes, writings, and all aspects of his research and influences. This is important to note as it gives evidence of the extent and seriousness of her research. This includes the influence Chekhov's work had on theorists and teachers such as Uta Hagen, Stanford Meisner and Herbert Berghof, and others.

In her last chapter, the candidate formulates a proposed approach to a teaching syllabus appropriate for today's students, understanding the essence and detail of Chekhov's work (theoretically and practically), and how to make it inspiring and effective for current acting students in our technologically evolved, globalized, interdisciplinary, and inter-national world. This is a welcome contribution to the knowledge of how to make Chekhov's notions, discoveries and practices enlighten the acting student of our times.

It is also to be noted that, as the student observes, this approach can be seen in how Chekhov's work has been appropriated in various parts of the world today, from America, to Hollywood, to the UK, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia. Years after he formulated his approach, it is very much taught and incorporated in various parts of the world in our era. (I have recently been part of a book titled: Stanislavsky in the World, which explores how his work is applied, adapted and developed in varied nations globally. It is not an absurd

proposition to suggest that it might be time for a book on Michael Chekhov in the World to be proposed to a publisher).

Further, the chapter chart is very helpful and well structured, coherently presented and is a welcome guide to the dissertation structure. The bibliography is extremely extensive evidencing the high quality and detail of the research done. The appendices are also very helpful and confirm the amount of important research the student has completed.

I also note that the combination of her personal experience does not overly influence the thesis and this is important for the scholarly endeavour. It is helpful to mention it in her dissertation, and how it guided her past experience, but, in the thesis, it serves to deepen the candidate's overall analysis and new understandings of Chekhov's work. In brief, her personal experience does not become the focus of the dissertation and this is important.

All my notes are testament to how the PhD shows evidence of originality, rigour and significance, and clearly meets those criteria for a thesis at this level.

The rigour is also evident in how the student combines a logical methodology in her chapter breakdown and how the research informs her innovative argument, analysis and investigative discussion with a critical awareness of how to not present an historical description only, but a thorough critique, and new understandings of Chekhov's work.

It is rare to give such a positive report, but merit must be given where it is due. I am confident that the PhD is of a very high calibre and the student deserves to know this.

I am happy to recommend a pass and publication, and wish the student the very best for her future work.

If you need any further information or comment, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

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