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Misti D. Koop

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AN APPLICATION OF ACTING METHODOLOGIES OF LEE STRASBERG, STELLA ADLER, AND SANFORD MEISNER TO ROLES IN ANTON IN SHOW BUSINESS

by

Misti D. Koop
Bachelor of Arts, Gustavus Adolphus College, 2002

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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Master of Arts

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This thesis, submitted by Misti D. Koop in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Joseph D. Bencik  
Dean of the Graduate School

April 30, 2008  
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Title An Application of Acting Methodologies of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner to My Roles in Anton in Show Business

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Date 4-24-08
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DEDICATION

For the people in my life that have given me an eternal love for theatre.

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For Mom and Dad (Holly and Wayne Koop)

for their never-failing encouragement to follow my dreams.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine and assess my approach to acting in *Anton in Show Business*, in pursuit of honest and truthful acting. This thesis will explore major principles of the acting methods of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner. This thesis will illustrate the application of these select principles to my roles of Kate, Ben, and Jackey in Jane Martin’s *Anton in Show Business*.

Chapter One will examine an overview of select principles of the acting methods of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner. Strasberg’s select principles of relaxation, concentration, and affective memory; Adler’s select principles of given circumstances, imagination, and action; and Meisner’s select principles of doing and listening, communion between actors, and emotional preparation, will be defined.

Chapter Two will demonstrate an application of the select principles of each acting method to my work in *Anton in Show Business*. I will explain my approach to acting through the applications of Strasberg’s select principles of relaxation, concentration, and affective memory; Adler’s select principles of given circumstances, imagination, and action; and Meisner’s select principles of doing and listening, communion between actors, and emotional preparation.

Chapter Three will provide a conclusion of this study. All research, applications, and assessment of my work will be observed together to determine my growth as an
actor, in my pursuit of honest and truthful acting. The basis of assessment is the degree of honesty and truthfulness in my performance.
CHAPTER I
RESEARCH OF ACTING METHODS

Introduction

It is my belief that a thorough and personal approach to characterizing a role can result in the discovery and the ability to produce honest and truthful acting. I chose to apply the acting methodologies of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner to my roles in Anton in Show Business. These three acting methods are direct descendents of Method acting. “Method acting emerged as a technique that drew from Stanislavski’s emphasis on the craft of acting, and accentuated working on a role that called upon the actor to build from his or her personal life and political ideals” (Krasner 130).

Select instructors of Method acting, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner, developed individual acting methods that focused on the pursuit of honest and truthful acting. “Method acting, when properly used, is holistic, enabling the actor to perform on several levels with conviction and confidence” (Krasner 147). It was my intent to experience honest and truthful acting by applying select principles of these acting methods to my character roles in Anton in Show Business by Jane Martin.

Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner agreed on many major components of Method acting. They were original founding members of the Group Theatre. As a theatre company, members of the Group Theatre studied and developed elements of Method acting together for several years (Krasner 131). Their contributions to the methodology
of Method acting supported the original focus of finding and creating truth in acting. In
his article, “Strasberg, Adler and Meisner. Method Acting,” David Krasner credits
Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner for their contributions to acting methods and their impact
on Method acting. Krasner states, “Although there are many instructors, directors and
actors who have contributed to its development, three Method acting teachers are
recognized as having set the standard of its success: Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and
Sanford Meisner” (129). He outlines the major contributions of each and also lists
specific components of acting that all three instructors held in agreement.

Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner agreed that everything an actor does or says on
stage must be justified. There must be a purpose for “every word, action and
relationship” (131). They also agreed, that “actors behave as if they are living in the
situation of the play” (131). They recognized that the emotions and behavior an actor
experiences onstage, must be real. This emphasis on ‘truthful behavior,’ intended that
“feelings must never be indicated” but must be real, coming from the inside of the actor
to the outside of the character (131).

However in the development and creation of truthful emotion to complement
truthful acting, the methods of Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner contrasted greatly. Krasner
further outlines these different techniques.

The actor personalizes the role, i.e. draws from the self, from his or her
emotional, psychological or imaginative reality, bringing into view aspects
of one’s memories, life experiences and observations that correlate with
the role” (132).
Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner recognize the importance for actors to personalize their acting. However, the production of truthful emotions is described differently by each instructor. These differences will be addressed as I investigate each theorist’s approach through their methodology and application.

Strasberg: Overview of Acting Method

Lee Strasberg (1901-1982) left the Group Theatre in 1937. Later in 1949, he joined the staff of the Actor’s Studio in New York. In early 1951, he assumed the role of artistic director. He held the position of artistic director of the Actor’s Studio and later the Actor’s Studio West in Los Angeles, California, until his death in February 1982 (Hull 16). His acting method is most closely associated with original forms of Method acting in the United States. Strasberg, being well read and equipped with a deep understanding of Stanislavski’s System, was one of the first actor/instructors to teach The Method for the original actors of the Group Theatre (Brestoff 84).

Strasberg focused on three major principles of acting: relaxation, concentration, and affective memory. His overall goal was, “freeing the expression of the actor” (Krasner 134). He believed that if these techniques were mastered, the actor, having freedom of expression, could personalize her work, resulting in honest and truthful acting (134). According to Strasberg’s method, the pursuit of honest and truthful acting begins with relaxation, followed by concentration.

Relaxation and Concentration

Relaxation, as described by Strasberg, allows the actor to be open and focused, ready to listen and respond. Garfield reflects, that Strasberg was known for his relaxation exercise of having a student sit in a chair and work to find a position in which she was
completely comfortable and able to fall asleep if she allowed herself. Consciously releasing tension and clearing the mind and body of stressors was the key for an actor to experience full relaxation (Krasner 134). When the actor achieved the state of relaxation, its complimenting partner, concentration, could smoothly follow.

Concentration, according to Strasberg, demands a strong application of sense memory. Krasner notes, when sense memory is used, “the actor recalls important events in their life, and then tries to remember only the sensual facets: touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing” (Krasner 134). Strasberg asked his actors to concentrate on an activity involving the observation of an imagined object and then required them to recreate the experience paying close attention to the details of the experience, using their five senses. “The point is not merely to mime the activity, but to find the psychological motivation underlying the experience” (Krasner 135). By allowing themselves to determine the motivation of their imagined actions, actors could perform convincing, truthful, and justified actions. Strasberg explains the desired result. “Creating imaginary circumstances, acting as if we were someone else, these are all acts of the imagination, which functions best when it is relaxed and concentrated” (Brestoff 101-102).

**Affective Memory**

Affective Memory is the method Strasberg used to teach his actors how to experience honest and truthful emotions onstage. Affective Memory is not to be confused with emotional recall, even though they are often treated synonymously. In fact, Strasberg was careful to separate the two methods. Emotional recall ‘recalls’ an emotion from a real and specific memory of an event, independently related to an individual actor. Affective memory recalls the memory of the emotion itself (Brestoff’
111). Instead of remembering the feeling present of the remembered event, actors were trained to remember the sensational details surrounding the event, brought to life through the application of sense memory. Therefore, even though the recalled event may be the ‘title’ of the memory; the memory itself, strengthened by the senses involved, is the actor’s memory of the emotion, not the actual memory of the event.

A collection of affective memories or “golden keys,” as many students called them, served as emotional triggers, for many successful actors, according to Strasberg. These “golden keys” could be incorporated into a dramatic scene at any given time (112). For stage actors, the demand for the repetitive delivery of emotions specific to the character and text is constant and crucial. He instructed actors to trigger their emotions using sense memory as their method of concentration, recalling the sensational experience rather than the feeling. Strasberg’s equation may have resembled this:

\[ \text{emotional memory} + \text{sense memory} = \text{affective memory} \]

Actors conditioned their emotions to respond like a reflex, triggered by sense memory. Strasberg took his cue from Ivan Pavlov, the Russian biologist who trained dogs to salivate when they heard a bell ring, even though no food was present. This was a conditioned behavioral response. Therefore Brestoff explains that Strasberg instructed, “Affective memory is based on conditioning” (Brestoff 111).

Truth in acting, resonated through Strasberg’s foundational acting techniques. In search of truthful acting, Strasberg believed in vocal, physical, and textual work for the actor, but above all, he insisted, as Krasner notes, that “the actor must purge the sense of ‘performing’ and find believability” (Krasner 138). Believability in acting, could best be found by applying affective memory and the “dual process of relaxation and
concentration" (Krasner 134). Brestoff writes, that Strasberg’s overall intent was “to help actors become artists capable of expressing and controlling honest and powerful emotion” (Brestoff 115).

**Adler: Overview of Acting Method**

Stella Adler (1901-1992) came to the Group Theatre as an established actress of the American Yiddish Theatre and of Vaudeville. Although she had already acquired a large amount of theatre experience, she yearned to know more (Brestoff 117). Unlike Strasberg and Meisner, Adler actually studied directly with Stanislavski in Paris in 1934. When she returned, she brought with her a wealth of firsthand knowledge. It was also at this point that “she broke with Strasberg on the fundamental precepts of the Method” (Krasner 139). While Strasberg leaned heavily on the emotional display of the actor, Adler felt the details for the play and the character were being ignored. Stanislavski had shared with her, a deeper development of a play’s and character’s given circumstances (Brestoff 118). Therefore, if details of the play were being sacrificed for truthful emotion, than perhaps, hypothesized Adler, the emotions were not fully truthful in the life of the play.

“Adler emphasizes the play’s given circumstances, the actor’s imagination, and physical actions” (Krasner 139). For Adler, the building blocks of acting reside in the actor’s imagination. Beyond this, these building blocks are arranged regarding the play’s given circumstances and actions. According to Adler, the focused combination of these three elements was crucial for the production of truthful acting (Brestoff 118).
Given Circumstances

The given circumstances of the play set up all of the foundational details that an actor needs to develop his or her character (118). If an actor did not fully absorb the given circumstances that the playwright intended in a script, then Adler believed, the actor would not be true to his or her character’s needs and portrayal. It would be similar to building a house without using blueprints. Quoting from a 1964, Adler interview, Krasner writes:

The character must be understood within the framework of the character’s own time and situation. Through the proper use of craft, the actor will see the differences of social, historical, and cultural environment between himself and the character [given by the playwright] (Krasner 139).

Adler instructed her students to be extremely mindful of what is already given in the text. Understanding a play’s situation and character details became the foundation for the actor’s development within the world of the play.

Imagination

Adler believed that “Ninety-nine percent of what you see and use on the stage comes from imagination” (Adler 17). As an actor, you are constantly acting as someone else in different surroundings and a different situation than your own; therefore you must rely on your imagination constantly. Every situation you encounter, as a different person, must be created internally and actively portrayed externally. Her students were instructed to “concentrate on their creative imagination rather than their conscious past” (Krasner 140). This statement places Adler’s preferred emphasis on pure imagination supported by the foundation of the text, rather than the actor’s recalled emotions. In fact, Adler
lectured to her students, “If you do not use your imagination, you have made no contribution to the play” (Adler 53).

Adler combined her concepts of given circumstances and imagination to guide students to find their truthful and emotional connections. Adler states, “All the emotion required of him can be found through his imagination in the circumstances” (Adler 47). By encouraging her actors to connect emotionally to the given circumstances of their characters, she directed them to personalize their given circumstances using imagination. Students learned to behave “as if” they were really living in the conditions of the play (Felner 4). If the play’s circumstances are not emotionally important to the actor, then the actor must find a “parallel” event or image that is personally important and substitute it into the character’s world (47).

Adler’s main personalization technique for parallel substitution is “paraphrasing.” She explained that paraphrasing “is taking the author’s ideas and putting them into the actor’s words, and thereby making them belong to the actor” (Adler 102). She asked her actors to be conscious of choosing imaginative things through paraphrasing that encourage them to “react, speak and move” (26). Through the technique of paraphrasing, actors not only described their parallel experience, but also brought it to life in the world of their character’s given circumstances. Truthful acting results when actors use the play’s given circumstances and make it emotionally meaningful, using their imagination. Choosing suitable and connected actions can truthfully enhance the actor’s delivery. “If the actor needs an action which he doesn’t respond to in the play, he can go back to his own life, not for the emotion, but for a similar action” (Adler 47).
Adler emphasizes the overall action of a play. Within this focus, she emphasizes two areas: action of the character and physicalizing the character. She believed that the actions “come first and words second. Words come out of the actions” (Adler 115). If Strasberg believed in developing a repertoire of affective memories, then Adler believed in developing a repertoire or what Krasner calls, a “vocabulary of actions” (Krasner 141). This emphasis on actions was encouraged by Stanislavski’s later work with the “active doing.”

Adler explained that an action is something you do within the boundaries of the given circumstances. It is justified and must fit into the ‘ruling idea’ of the play. This ‘ruling idea’ “must appeal to the actor emotionally and intellectually” (141). According to Adler, if the actor plays her actions convincingly in agreement with the character’s given circumstances and the ruling idea of the play, then it can be evaluated that the actor is personalizing the material in a truthful and convincing manner (141).

Adler connected given circumstances, imagination, and action together as crucial components for truthful acting or an actor’s justification. When an actor finds justification for his or her text and actions, he or she becomes agitated. The resulting agitation brings a response of action and emotion. Therefore, the combination of given circumstances, imagination, and action will produce and justify truthful acting. It is the actor’s job to choose the justification that motivates truthful actions and emotions, fitting to the given circumstances of text and character. Adler stated, “Your talent consists of how well you are able to shop for your justification. In your choice lies your talent” (Adler 48).
Meisner: Overview of Acting Method

Sanford Meisner (1905-1997) left the Group Theatre in 1935, due to his independent understanding of the Method. He felt the communal foundation of acting, was being downplayed due to heavy focus on affective memory and internal processing of the individual, in place of the relationships between actors. Meisner was in search of a focus on acting that went beyond what, according to Brestoff, he called “casual realism” (128). He was hired as an acting instructor at the Neighborhood Playhouse in 1935, and became the school’s director the following year. He outlined that his concepts of doing and listening, communion between actors, and emotional preparation, created a truthful origin for all acting no matter the dramatic situation.

Doing and Listening

Meisner was known for applying several rehearsal techniques to a scene in order to teach actors to find innovative truth through the essentials of listening to each other and through the act of doing. Krasner commented that Meisner’s teaching space was covered with quotes of doing such as, ‘Act Before You Think’ and ‘An Ounce of Behavior Is Worth a Pound of Words’ (142). Once the text of a scene was learned, Meisner instructed his actors to ‘play’ with the action and tone, finding new discoveries with each run of the scene. Krasner writes, that Meisner’s instructional objective for his students was “once the actor reaches the time to perform, what remains is the actual doing and reacting” (143). In the honesty of doing and reacting, truthful acting can result.

Listening exercises were a foundation of Meisner’s acting instruction. Meisner addressed the actor-objectives of doing and reacting through the listening and ‘play’ that
motivated his acting exercises. He started with simple exercises of repetition. With firm eye contact, full-body listening, and heightened awareness, actors verbally exchanged their observations of each other and, as Krasner states, with practice, the actors gained confidence and "their insight deepened" (144). In the exercise of repetition, Meisner instructs that listening is a form of observation. The behavioral observations made between actors are given and received truthfully, through active and impulsive responses. Meisner adds, "The meaning is in the behavior. You don't do anything until that behavior makes you do something" (Meisner and Longwell 42). When his students moved on to a dialogue, these same repetition exercises were encouraged as well as a sense of heightened urgency.

Communion Between Actors

The communion that evolves between actors is crucial. For Meisner, truthful acting wasn't necessarily the actor living truthfully in the character's given circumstances as Adler would suggest, or the actor delving into her memory to find truthful emotions to strengthen the scene, as Strasberg would demand. According to Meisner, truthful acting meant, "responding truthfully to the other person" (Meisner and Longwell 40); honestly reacting to your partner, the other person on stage. His 'aim of repetition' (Krasner 145) is defined as "becoming fully available to your partner" (Silverberg, The Sanford Meisner Approach 42).

Many argued that the reliance on 'the partner' diminished the emphasis on character development and emotional honesty. But for Meisner and his actors, truthful acting grew out of repetition between actors as they listened and reacted in the moment of
the scene together. He felt that character creation was fluid and spontaneous and evolved through rehearsal, as long as the actors truthfully listened to each other (Brestoff 132).

Meisner’s technique focuses on the development of communion between actors, through exercises of doing and listening, to cultivate moment-to-moment acting. Meisner’s moment-to-moment form of acting can be synonymously defined as impulsive acting, or, as Krasner writes:

For Meisner, impulse is a response to internal or external stimuli… The actor responds by acting on the stimuli, creating an ‘impulsive’ behavior that emerges truthfully and spontaneously from reactions rather than from preplanned behavior. (Krasner 145)

Much like a reflex, honest acting can be described as purely impulsive. Meisner instructed his students not to think; to get out of their heads; to listen and react with their entire sense of being. “Act Before You Think” (145). Therefore, not only did Meisner-actors focus on impulse, but also on truthful and natural reaction (145).

Meisner’s moment-to-moment acting based on behavioral and impulsive reactions emitted from one actor to another is described by Krasner, as “immediate and spontaneous human communication and interaction” (146). Meisner often related this type of interaction to that of a jazz jam session where musicians take turns soloing. To communicate the changing of soloists and the transitions to new sections of the musical piece, they listen carefully to each other’s music and body language to follow and lead each other through the piece. This communal sense of living in the moment, using heightened listening skills as a guide, allows the group of musicians to find answers without discussing anything. Through listening, they know who solos, what order the
solos are performed, when changes in mood occur, and when dynamic shifts in volume, style, and tone occur. Improvisational jazz forms are truly a living example of what Meisner demands of his actors in their communion, listening and responding by impulse, from moment to moment.

Brestoff states, “Meisner felt that the connection between actors was vital to the life of a scene, and that when that bond was broken, the acting lost its special quality and power” (129). ‘Spontaneous communion’ between actors became one of Meisner’s main contributions to Method acting. In his classes, students constantly worked with a partner, always attempting to establish a truthful exchange between themselves and other actors.

Meisner did not ignore the fact that actors had to express realistic emotions. He was very clear about “being full” when the situation called for it. If an actor entered a scene completely full of the needed emotion for the character’s situation, then the actor could honestly listen and react truthfully to his or her partner without trying to ‘push’ the emotion. This concept is especially important when working “in the extreme” (Silverberg, Emotional Freedom 4).

**Emotional Preparation**

To understand Meisner’s approach to the use of emotions, it is essential to return to the actor’s imagination. Meisner, like his co-founders of Group Theatre, found the imagination to be an extremely powerful, underdeveloped, and unused tool, that is unique to the species of human beings. Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner all looked to imagination as the central focus of personalization. Strasberg used imagination to strengthen memories with meaning using the five senses. Adler used imagination to strengthen and substitute personal events for the actor, often applying the technique of paraphrasing.
Meisner used imagination to create a completely imagined circumstance centered on an "element of truth." He referred to this process as Emotional Preparation.

Larry Silverberg has written extensively on the unique instruction of Sanford Meisner. Silverberg explains Meisner’s approach to emotional preparation as having two main components: an ‘element of truth’ and an ‘imaginary circumstance’ (Silverberg, The Sanford Meisner Approach 91). An actor’s ‘element of truth’ is most often her relationship to important people in her personal life. This ‘being’ or ‘element of truth’ is then placed in an imagined situation that conjures an extreme emotion for the actor. These varying situations are the ‘imaginary circumstances’. “The activity (circumstance) is a product of your imagination based on an element of truth, which is its importance to you” (Silverberg, The Sanford Meisner Approach 94).

Meisner, through Silverberg says, “If all we know how to do is use actual past events, we are restricted in our ability to work. But our imagination is infinite!” (Emotional Freedom 21). Past personal memories change with time. If an actor always relies on the death of her father for sorrow, eventually this emotion will change. But if the actor uses an ‘element of truth’ important to her right now, today, then her preparation will have the capacity to hold more truthful emotion (Silverberg, Emotional Freedom 23). Meisner believed that actors could achieve truthful acting by completely devoting themselves to their partner within their acting communion, by honestly living in the moment by actively doing and listening, and by entering the scene with the appropriate emotion, created with a truthful and heightened emotional preparation.
Conclusion

The methods of Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner differ greatly. They each approach the instruction of truthful acting from different angles using a different focus. However, all three instructors were very motivating and effective, evident by their rate of student success. They had a passion for their method of acting and approached it with authority and vigor. Although each believed their method was the best technique for learning the essential skills of truthful acting; each also respected other acting methods. Their methods are used across the country today as prominent instructional sources of Method acting.
CHAPTER II
APPLICATION OF ACTING METHODS

Sero-comedy, *Anton in Show Business* by Jane Martin, offers a critique of contemporary American regional theatre in Kate Todoravskia’s determination to produce Anton Chekhov’s *The Three Sisters*, with her San Antonio theatre company, Actors Express. Kate’s valiant struggle to overcome obstacles, resolve conflicts, and keep her acting company running, ultimately fails when financial backing is withdrawn and her star actress abandons the show for a film role. If, as many critics agree, Martin is a pseudonym for Jon Jory, who ran the regional theatre Actors Theatre of Louisville for several years, then the play is also a semi-biographical account of the serious challenges of theatre in America.

One of the challenges presented by the playwright, illustrates the limited opportunities offered for women in American theatres. Martin/Jory answered this challenge by choosing to use an all-female cast to play multiple roles that include male characters. I played three characters that the playwright assigned to one actor: Kate, the producer, Jackey, a gay costume designer, and Ben, a country-western singer who plays Vershinin. While I readily found much of myself in Kate, I had unique challenges personalizing my two male roles. I faced additional challenges in that the script requires frequent, and often rapid, transitions between the roles of Kate and Ben. I had to discover methods of acting to assist me making these transitions off-stage so I could enter
convincingly as my new character. Further, I had to find methods to help me personalize the role of a gay man and the role of a man in love with the character, Holly.

This chapter explains how and when I applied the acting methods of Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner to personalize each role. I will further define and explain my application of the three select principles of each instructor during my work in rehearsal and performance of Anton in Show Business.

Strasberg: Application of Principles

Relaxation and Concentration

Hull writes, that Strasberg believed that, “relaxation should always begin preparation for performance” (Hull 30). He assigned relaxation as the perfect partner to concentration for acting. “Relaxation is the tool that enables the actor to make the fullest use of his instrument – himself” (31). When the actor is relaxed, his instrument is fully capable and ready to send and receive information. This specific procedure of sending and receiving information leads to concentration. “Concentration is the process of focusing one’s mind on an object or objects” (33). These objects that Strasberg refers to can be people, physical objects, mental images, situations or sensations that the actor has experienced or imagined. Strasberg, articulated by Hull, illuminates their interlocking relationship:

Relaxation is an important prelude to concentration, for it releases muscle tension and allows the mind to focus on the object of concentration. At the same time, concentration helps the actor develop and maintain relaxation by preventing extraneous thoughts that produce muscle tension. Relaxation and concentration thus support one another; the two processes must go hand in hand. (Hull 33)
The goal is for relaxation and concentration to compliment each other and work together, so that their product is believable and fitting for the given circumstances of the play.

As an actor, I had to be relaxed and I had to concentrate, in order to be convincing as Ben seducing Holly. This scene consisted of a string of scenes between Ben and Holly. Earlier, Ben had come alive for me using substitution techniques for the sequence of scenes, but because of the circumstances, I needed more strength to carry out the scene in a believable manner.

I knew if I could relax and concentrate on my situation deeply enough, then I could be convincing, shifting my conversation through the string of scenes with Holly, from “coffee to sex.” As Ben, I imagined the awkward circumstances of The Three Sisters rehearsals. Everywhere I turn I see Holly and secretly dwell on how beautiful and attractively mysterious she is. I can’t focus on my lines or what the director asks of me because all I can manage to process is my desire for Holly. My inner conflict grew as Holly began to urge the infatuation between us. Going into the scenes, I made the conscious decision to relax and concentrate on my situation and Holly’s interaction. This focus propelled me to be truthful on stage.

I approached Ellery admitting that I was sexually attracted to her. In performance, I knew I would have to overcome this awkward, fear-driven feeling. I needed to relax and put things into perspective. I was comfortable acting with Ellery and I had been aware of this character challenge for several months prior. Now, I needed to relax and concentrate.

As actors, we are faced with character challenges all the time. Kissing another female was something I had never done before. The technique my director used helped

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me to relax and concentrate within the issue. She held a closed rehearsal for Ellery and I to rehearse the kiss. We laughed before and after our first few short kisses, shaking the awkwardness out of our systems. After the first initial moments of contact, we were ready to add the physical requirements of the scene. The practice-kisses increased in length, guided by our director, and we continued to block every move of the scene. The lines and a series of kisses were blocked to align with the accompanying actions of removing each other’s clothes and moving to the bed, which sat several feet away. Eventually, we worked our timing with Joby who interrupts us from continuing physically during the scene. I was thankful for Ellery’s matching drive to make our scene as believable as possible. We both possessed an equal level of professionalism and respect for the scene and each other, which made the scene convincing within the play. Concentrating thoroughly in our given circumstances, we were able to accomplish the challenge.

_Affective Memory_

Krasner defined Strasberg’s acting method as being largely psychological, Adler’s method as being largely sociological, and finally Meisner’s method as being behavioral. Associating a parallel explanation, Adler focuses on given circumstances, Strasberg on affective memory, and finally Meisner focuses on emotional preparation (147).

As Hull notes, Lee Strasberg wrote, “The use of affective memory and sense memory, is the discovery of Constantin Stanislavski, and it is the cornerstone of the modern method of training the actor” (Hull 82). He explained that affective memory was not just remembering an event and thinking about the feeling, but “actually re-
experiencing the entire occurrence” with the aid of sensational memories and images to strengthen the remembered event (82).

Affective memory occurs when, “The actor recreates the stimuli that were present during an emotional experience in his own life. This form of emotional memory involves response to imaginary stimuli” (Hull 83). The following example of my application of affective memory involves a chronological experience of my response to stimuli from my memory, as they are periodically triggered from the action of the scene.

One of my favorite scenes to perform, as Kate, was her confession to the actors regarding the recent news that she had been fired and the theatre was shutting its doors. Having just exited from Don’s office, I was able to re-enter immediately into the rehearsal room for this scene. As an actor, I was thankful for this, as I was able to continue the momentum of my circumstances, which helped me to enter my affective memory. When I exited, I did not stop rigidly walking, but made a tight hairpin path grabbed my binder, did not make eye contact with any stage hands in the lobby, and entered with even more anger than when I had left. Essentially this physical transition of continued and accelerated movement inspired my emotional connection. I entered into thickened circumstances of the scene and into the sensational images as the energy lead me into my affective memory.

As I began to tell the three actresses how proud I was of them, I could feel my affective memory processing. All of a sudden, the circumstance became a stimulus into the images of my memory. I was in the band room of the community in which I first taught. In the memory, I was talking to a few of my devoted students (Casey, Holly, and
Lisabette) that had accepted me as a new teacher and had decided to learn from me and give me the chance I needed to succeed.

On stage, I stopped abruptly in front of Holly, Casey, and Lisabette. I could not sit down at first, even though a chair was provided. Their giddy conversation made me feel worse, knowing what I had to tell them. When I said “Hi” they knew something was wrong. Facing unwelcome facts is difficult, but when you face the people that your news directly affects, the impact is worse. I stood there trying to figure out what to say. In a controlled and noble manner, I wanted to tell them how proud I was of their dedication and progress. I had lost my edge as a producer and company manager, and now, I could no longer hide my weakness. “Are my eyes red?” I asked. “I hate it when my eyes are red!” (Martin 60).

The term “vulnerable” entered my mind, to describe Kate’s personal state at that moment. (Deep within me, as the actor, I could feel myself fighting this very thought.) As Kate, I struggled unwillingly to absorb and “take in” this truth of being fired and losing everything important to me. While as the actor, Kate’s situation of pushing vulnerability away, was exactly what I was fighting to embrace and let in. There were moments in the rehearsal process, that I was so angry with myself for not allowing this truth to be felt, that I would honestly get frustrated with myself and it would manifest as Kate’s frustration – in reverse. And yet, looking back at these moments, I was breaking through my shell and slowly letting out my true vulnerability. I have been told that everything beautiful has a crack in it to let the light in. Actors are full of cracks so they can let the light in and the truth out. Kate, in this scene, became very personal for me.
As I approached a deeper level of vulnerability, I was able to dig into a personal memory and allow it to affect me, giving Kate her needed and truthful emotion.

The one thing Kate had successfully loved and nurtured, her theatre company, was falling apart and would soon be dead to her. I worked to embrace how this situation would feel. I believed that Kate had no close family and her parents and younger brother spoke twice a year and all lived in different states. No children, no pets, no close or intimate friends; this theatre company was all Kate had in life. Much like myself, I was far from home, very alone, and all I had was my band program.

Kate’s explanation, found a sudden burst in action, which triggered my memory’s action. Kate and I screamed, “To hell with everybody!” (Martin 60). Kate’s wall crumbled and so did mine. Yes – to HELL with everybody. There was no justification to soften what they had done to me, no polite path to forgiveness. It was wrong. It hurt. They, the people with the power, were wrong.

“Okay, that feels better” (60). It did and I allowed Kate to explain herself to the three women even though much of me was still inside the image of my band room, angry and feeling betrayed, as I had never felt before. It is important for professionals, like educators (Misti) and producers (Kate), to maintain their composure while explaining difficult things to their followers. “It was very emotional for me to see this great play being so well done in our little theatre that has... struggled and... held on by its fingernails... believe me... for all these years” (60). Yes, success was shining our way, my way, and I was so grateful for this turn of events. I lived in Kate’s circumstances further, parallel to my memory’s circumstances, as my inner-monologue expanded beneath Kate’s lines: ‘Thirteen years ago, I settled in San Antonio and hoped for this
successful outcome of Actors Express. It took thirteen years to get this far! And just
when I can finally see my work paying off, I am fired. (I am betrayed.) Not only am I
fired, but I am fired for unjustified reasons. My heart and efforts were in line and my
work was completely devoted towards running this company (this band program) and
making sure this show progressed in a timely manner. I was doing my job with passion
and effort forty times over and still, I was fired!'

My ears burned as I said, “Albert & Sons removed the funding” (60). Because of
a problem that they overlooked, I was in for a series of black eyes that I did not deserve.
Again, my affective memory kicked into gear, enhancing the situation and then delving
into a parallel memory. “And when I told Joe Bob Mattingly, the Chairman of our Board
of Directors, he said…” Joe Bob: “Damn woman!” (60). As I watched Kim absorb the
reality of Joe Bob, I absorbed the reality of Kate at that moment.

Strasberg’s technique of affective memory has often been accused of making
actors indulge themselves in their memories, forcing their listening responsibilities to be
secondary. After experiencing this technique, I understand this criticism. Being aware of
this potential result, I sat in my chair, listening as carefully as I could to Joe Bob so that
my emotional memory would not take me out of focus or out of Kate’s concentration.

Kate’s stage circumstances created a string of stimuli back into my memory, and
again, I flashed back to my band room. This time, sitting around a table, sat my principal
and four angry parents (Board of Directors). Over the course of the school year, a group
of devoted band parents had slowly began to micro-manage my work as a new band
director. At this meeting, my frustrations and theirs came to a head. It was after that
night, even with full administrative support, that I knew I could not return the following
school year, due to the situation that had escalated. I sat at the head of the table, fielding verbal blows, just like Kate. My concerts and band activities had proved successful through the year, and yet, I could not please them no matter what I did. Much like Kate’s moment, I could not find the courage to yell back; I allowed them to release their frustrations (just like Joe Bob). While holding back my rage, my release resulted in angry tears. I tried to stop crying to show them that I was strong enough to fight back and defend what I knew was right. But my tears kept streaming.

Here I (as Kate) sat, in front of the entire Board of Directors that had supported, promoted, and recruited me as the producing director of Actors Express. I couldn’t move. If I did, I imagined I would have pushed the table over or grabbed my binder and pelted Joe Bob in the face as many times as I could. Even in the final minutes of my career, I did not know how to burst into a deviant yelling fight. This foreign action of severe confrontation became the action that I fought to suppress. I wanted so badly to stand up and defend myself! And yet, I did not know how – my courage had never been developed in that direction. Deep down, I knew this was true for me, personally; and the moment hurt all the more. I was swimming in a pool with no sides to grab onto because I, in all of my careful preparation, had not built them.

To keep my mind focused on listening, I used Joe Bob’s insults as parallel statements that could match statements and actions within my memory. Joe Bob spoke, “I’ve been pourin’ my money an’ the money of my friends down your double-talk rathole since Jesus was a pup.” “By God, you wonder why you don’t have a big audience!” “Now you just blew 15% of your budget ‘cause you riled up the tobacco interests, plus you got the colored rattlin’ on my cage, and as of this precise minute, you are out of luck,
out of work an outta San Antonio, Texas.” As Joe Bob said “out of work,” the projector slides turned the screens to red. I always caught them out of the corner of my left eye. When Joe Bob said his final lines regarding “poor handicap some actual, measurable good” and “aesthetic from one year to the goddamned next!” (61). I imagined the leading band parent’s head on Kim’s shoulders, and the blood in me boiled as Kate’s last board meeting concluded with a final, firing blow.

I am grateful for the line that both Joe Bob and I said together, for it propelled me, actively, into the conclusion of my scene, complete with my images and emotions. “You got three minutes to clean out your desk” (61). Some nights I felt exhausted and defeated by Joe Bob’s firing and other nights, my anger from my memory, kept me driving through. I looked into all three sets of eyes looking intently back at me. I knew that this time, they hung onto every word, because they had certainly never seen this kind of expression from Kate. As actors, they had certainly never seen this kind of expression from me, personally either. “What, do you suppose, I thought I was doing here? Making theatre because… See I just can’t remember” (61). (Inside my heart, I said the same line in my band room, but added, “… Making music because… See I just can’t remember.”)

Even if a person cares whole-heartedly for people and their experience, this will not ultimately convince observers that this is your real intent. Winning means that both sides understand each other and believe the result to be true. A one-sided effort, in the end, does not work.) I knew how I felt. As Kate, fired after thirteen years of passionate dedication, having my only love taken from me, I knew.

All of a sudden, after all of this anger, I felt exhausted. After humiliation, reflective wisdom is very clear. I said, “I think I hate theatre. It makes you think it was
about something when it was actually only about yourself. It fascinates you. It seduces you. It leaves you penniless by the side of the road. Screw Thespis! Run for your lives” (62). Whatever your passion or perhaps your career (band directing) may be, it consumes you. The ideas and the people involved pull you along, make you think you are doing great things, and then you are dropped on the pavement with no ounce of gratitude, let alone an explanation for it in the first place. You ponder, how can people with hearts and souls be so cold? And then you grow up and realize that that, my friends, is part of life. It is reality.

I am certainly not saying that I, the actor, was flawless every night as I worked to personalize Kate’s circumstances using affective memory. I am saying that I grew from these moments and realized the real potential power of memory and imagination. They are huge tools that dwell within us, and if we have the courage to use them, they are there for us. Because they are so powerful, it is hard to know where to begin to open their doors, allow them to stimulate our actions and eventually, learn to control them.

Adler: Application of Principles

Given Circumstances

In her text, The Technique of Acting, Stella Adler writes, “You must understand that the first rule is that you accept the circumstances that the playwright gives you as truth… [then] it is your responsibility to fill that place” (31). When actors can accept their character’s circumstance as truth, they can then begin to build upon it with imagination. If an actor understands the basic elements of the play’s meaning and setting, then the actor can determine how her character fits socially into the given circumstances of the play. Again, Adler writes, “The character must be understood
within the framework of the character’s own time and situation” (Krasner 139). Primary factors of a character’s given circumstances come from the text. Other factors that increase creative acting choices and characterization, result from imagined circumstances that manifest from the given circumstances of the playwright’s text.

I will outline the factual given circumstances for each character. My complete description of each character, using given circumstances as well as “imagined” or extended, personally created character facts, are provide in Appendices: A, B, and C.

Kate: Katrina (Kate) Todoravskia is the producing director of the theatre company, Actors Express in San Antonio, TX. Her current project is helping with the audition process and management of the artistic team for Anton Chekhov’s The Three Sisters (Martin 11). Kate wants the best directors and actors she can possibly find for her company and the artistic growth of her community (23, 37); even though most residents don’t attend or understand the plays that Actors Express produces (61). Kate attended Stanford, Harvard, and Yale, in that order (23, 60). Kate is sexually confused regarding her sexual orientation, and finds deep desires within her that she doesn’t quite understand and can’t fully repress or express (11, 35-36). It is very frustrating for Kate to lose her self-control (60).

Ben: Ben Shipwright currently lives in San Antonio with his wife and two kids, four and seven years old (29). His wife is ill (48). Ben is a regionally, famous country-western singer (28). Lately, he’s been quite successful with his recordings making the “Top 50 Country” singles list (28). Ben does some acting for the community theatre of Actors Express (28). He admits that he has fallen in love with Holly (50, 66). He leaves his wife (57) and gives up everything (66) for the chance to start a life with Holly.
Jackey: Jackey currently works as a professional costume designer in the San Antonio area (43). Jackey is known for his positive attitude and outlook on life (45). He is very street-smart and digests large concepts with clear understanding and eloquent verbal interpretation (44-45). Jackey is very accustomed to working with film and stage divas (44). By saying the right things at the right time and by playing the right countering personality, he is able to convince Holly to wear the dress (44-45). He thinks fast and works fast (44-45). Wikewitch gathers that he is a talented and intelligent costume designer based on the fact that Jackey convinces Holly to wear Masha's dress with a complex, yet clear description of Chekhov's underlying meaning of the text (45).

Defining given circumstances is often a practice paired with full script and character analysis. Krasner writes, that script analysis and character development involve the actor's ability to analyze given circumstances, objectives, super-objectives, moment-to-moment acting involving character relationships, and the actor's ability to "personalize" their role physically and vocally (131). Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner all encouraged their students to use these practices. Objectives and the through-line of action, character relationships, and character development of action (physical and vocal) for Kate, Ben and Jackey are also included in Appendices: D, E, and F.

Adler explains, "A great disservice was done to American actors when they were told that they had to experience themselves on the stage instead of experiencing the circumstances... The truth is always the truth in the circumstances of the character" (32). If the actor believes in the truth of given circumstances, as Adler directs, then the actor can begin to apply imagination to elements of character creation.
Lastly, the emotion beneath the words and actions must fit the circumstances appropriately. “Emotion should ideally come from the actor’s commitment to the circumstances” (Bresloff 120).

Imagination

Adler goes on to say, “Every word, every action, must originate in the actor’s imagination” (17). As Kate, directly following my moment at Lisabette’s door, I went right into my speech to the cast of *The Three Sisters* at their first rehearsal. As an actor, it took me awhile to figure out how to carry over my feelings of awkwardness and defeat of vulnerability ‘at the door,’ to this “rehearsal” scene. The lines of this scene were also an acting-obstacle at first. My monologue rambled on, talking about my odd childhood, how I came to love the Russian Classics and why I felt it was crucial to bring a Chekhov-experience to the people of San Antonio. Kate’s speech is a defense mechanism, while her subtext tells the truth of the situation.

I found it difficult to grasp the urgency of this scene, so directed my energy to the real situation at hand. My subtextual actions involved trying to avoid making eye contact with Lisabette and to some degree, also with Holly and Casey. By physically pacing and continuously talking, I was able to maintain a flow of words to try to cover the awkward atmosphere. I was also simultaneously trying to stress a new mission of Actors Express, in order to align it with the theatrical morals of our newly hired, longstanding, Chekhov director, Wikewitch Konalkvis. I (as Kate) was uncomfortable in this scene, feeling exposed and awkward around the actors and inferior to Wikewitch. It was very important for me to feel awkward and not to indicate awkward.
My personalization process for this scene evolved primarily from Adler’s focus on imagination. “Imagination refers to the actor’s ability to accept new situations” (given circumstances), as if they are true (Adler 24). With my director’s guidance, I defined the urgency of the circumstances and then enhanced Kate’s reality using my imagination. As I believed in my new reality, I could sense emotions within me that produced true awkwardness.

I experimented with techniques of affect memory and emotional preparation for this scene, but strengthening Kate’s situation using my imagination was my strongest choice. With practice, my physical and vocal actions aligned within Kate’s imagined reality. For example, when I crossed behind Lisabette, I avoided eye contact and moved slightly further away from her chair than from others near my path. This action created awkward tension between Lisabette and myself. I imaged that she was laughing at me when I had my back turned towards her. Her action, made me self-conscious and caused me to hold my binder in front of my chest, as if to suggest protection from shame. I imagined that the ‘three sisters’ had told the new director about my recent exposure. Because I had known the new director, Andwenyth, before they had, this meant that she was able to see my weakness today and I was afraid that I could not hide it. As my speech wandered, so did my voice. I sensed abrupt shifts in vocal volume and emphasis. These imaged factors created a tense and uncomfortable atmosphere for me to struggle in.

When Don Blount entered to meet the cast, I was relieved that he had interrupted the current confrontation between Casey and Joby. As he continued selfishly on his rant, I was forced to listen and support although I did not agree with him at all. It was funding or pride and I had to choose funding. When Casey insulted Don, I imagined him pulling
the funding with one short sentence and a beady-eyed stare. This thought made me want to shrink into a speck of dust and disappear. When Don left, I was so relieved that my impulse was to get down on my knees and thank the lord that he did not pull our funding. The thought of my imagined result made me want to slap Casey for being so disrespectful, almost causing our company to lose all financial support. Suppressing these two actions, supplied me with much tension and frustration.

Another example of using imagination to strengthen the circumstances of the situation to personalize an emotional situation, occurred after Holly announced that she would fund the opening of The Three Sisters. As Ben, I was relieved, knowing that this meant that I had the chance to build a relationship with Holly. I imagined moving with Holly to a new, beautiful home by the ocean with a large deck and high, sunny windows, where she could do commercials and I could write music, professionally. We would share walks on the beach and lovely meals together on our deck, overlooking the sunset. I sat, relieved and hopeful, in my chair, dreaming of our new life together. I kept looking over at Holly and spinning the brim of my hat on the floor, obviously infatuated with her and our future I had envisioned.

When Wikewitch told us that he could not stay, I connected with him, absorbing his reality so that I could understand. When the girls said, “You just have to do the Chekhov you’re good enough to do” (Martin 64), I was all for it; again, this meant Holly in my life. Then DreamWorks called for Holly. First I froze in shock, but as she ran out of the room to take the call, I knew. Nothing had been said, but I already knew. The imagined images of my hopeful future with Holly in our home by the sea with her decorating and my music, now started to blur and fade.
Again, I worked to personalize. Holly re-entered slowly, trying to conceal the news she had received. “I got a film!” (65). Crash – my hopes fell. I mouthed, “shit,” what else could I do? Did I have any ounce of a chance left? Holly went on discussing her opportunity with Casey and Lisabette. I sat there letting my options fester in my imagination. Would I chase her? Would I ignore her, as she walked out of the room for the last time? I imagined myself running after her limousine after the preview of her new film. I imagined that I caught up to the limousine and pleaded to her through the glass of the window, to please get out of the car and come back to me. I imagined her big, brown, stone eyes staring right through me to the fans cheering from the sidewalk, completely ignoring my sincere confession of love.

Back in the rehearsal room, all I could do was ask her to consider me before leaving for good. That was my only hope, however small. The imagined scenario produced desperation in my mind and heart. As I tried to fight it off, my actions became agitated. I found myself twirling my hat, changing my sitting position, rubbing my face, and shooting fast glances in Holly’s direction, as if to make sure she was still there.

As she ran out without acknowledging that I was even in the room, or perhaps choosing to ignore me so she didn’t have to deal with our situation, I stood up and stopped her with, “I’ll come with.” “I don’t have anything here. I got rid of everything here. You’re it.” “I love you” (66). What else could I say; that’s all I had left. As Holly explained her already-made decision, I just absorbed it, trying to understand. Again, the walls of our beautiful home by the ocean crumbled and faded in my imagination. She said, “This is my shot.” “You don’t want to hang around Malibu while I give head for
billing.” That one hurt. “You have to blow me off.” With that line, now Holly was forcing me to end our dream.

All of a sudden, she was asking me to ruin what we started together? Then Holly said, “Go back to your wife” (66). Ouch. As Ben, I thought, “You are telling me to go back after I gave up everything to be with you? Do you realize what ‘everything’ means?” I looked into her stone eyes and tried to find any ounce of compassion... nothing. I stood still, allowing myself to see the final, blurred picture of our life together in imagination. Even though Holly had no connection to my imagined future for us, she was still throwing it all away. As Holly closed the door of our relationship, I couldn’t help but do the same. The sting of her hurtful comments, forced me to pull away, as I stood like stone, watching her walk away for the last time.

Action

Adler describes action for actors: “An action is something you do; it has an end; it is done in circumstances; and it is justified” (35). She continues by explaining, “The aim of your approach to acting is to find the actions in a scene or play” (35). If actions must fit these requirements to be part of the character and ultimately part of the play, then it is essential, Brestoff notes, that “actions occur within circumstances” (122).

Adler also explains that when an action has an end, it drives to meet an objective that furthers the action of the play. Whether you reach the end and succeed or do not reach the end and fail, the result is realized. After winning or losing the objective, the action of the character must change. Adler states, “The things that you do to accomplish your actions are called activities” (Adler 37). These activities or tactics, through trial and
error, help you achieve what you want, as the character in the life of the play (Felner 127-128).

In order to justify my actions in this scene, I designed a series of physical choices to fulfill the needs of my actions. Prior to Andwenyth’s entrance, I worked to inspire the three sisters with my new mission of Actors Express. My objective, “to inspire,” involved a series of tactics or activities. As Kate, inspiring the three sisters, actively meant “to grab” their attention. This action directed me to lean into my audience; “Actors Express. Get it? Express? We are a serious theatre. We are unique” (Martin 23). “To grab” lead me to overly articulate my words; “What is our artistic policy? Well, I can state that policy clearly. We live these ideas. At Actors Express, we call them the Seven Virtues” (23). ‘To grab” lead me to pronounce every point I made at the same dynamic level, due to my enthusiasm of the Actors Express mission; my listing of the virtues maintained a strong dynamic level. I sensed that my action “to grab” was failing. I listened to the actions of Casey’s eyes beginning to glaze over, Lisabette staring at me with a blank expression, and Holly glancing down at her nails and occasionally rolling her eyes behind her sunglasses. Absorbing these cues, I changed tactics, changing my action.

Inspiring them with my new mission, lead me “to surprise” them. This action directed me to make sharp movements, keeping them alert; “Number one, we do plays that… (complex gesture of hands growing toward ceiling). “To surprise” lead me to fumble my hands around each other as I searched for the right words; “Two: our style is surgically defined as… (sounds and rigid hand gestures of a deep line with two sides to belong to) and only that” (23). “To surprise” lead me to ‘paint a picture’ using my body
and voice to weave a sense of excitement into their understanding; “So that in summation, or, seventh, we can say... (hands and sound squiggling up and down, like a river with many tributaries) and we say that with no fear of being misunderstood” (23). Again, I sensed that my action “to surprise” was failing. I listened to the actions of Casey fully staring out the window, Lisabette now looking confused with a wrinkled nose and brow, and Holly cocking her head to one side and bouncing her top leg crossed over the other, as if to challenge me to affect her. I changed tactics, changing my action.

Inspiring the actors with my new mission, lead me “to preach” at them. My desire to fulfill this action directed me to look deep into their eyes, like laser beams, and dig into their understanding; “Oh, I know this policy makes us controversial. We offend, we pique, we challenge...” (23). “To preach” lead me to speak charismatically to impress the mission’s subtle beauty; “bringing together, healing, and making our community one” (23). “To preach” lead me to sum up the mission’s purpose with a sweep of my hands; “In a nutshell. This unique mission has made us essential to San Antonio” (23). As I sensed that my action of “to preach” was also failing, I tried to ignore the defeat, but then Casey’s, followed by Holly’s interruptions forced me to change my action and therefore my tactics as well.

This example highlights the fact that every action on stage must consist of several justified actions that fit within the circumstances of the play, to help meet the character’s objective. These actions must have a destination and are realized by the actor as either won or lost. They are supported by tactics, which propel the action forward. This resulting action propels the through-line of action or objective of the scene and ultimately of the play.
Adler explains, "When I ask an actor to physicalize his actions, and use his circumstances, the purpose is to take the burden off the actor... Anything you do is physicalizing. Doing means physicalizing" (Adler 41). If acting is doing, then actors must perform their actions within the physical reality of their character in the play’s given circumstances. Physicalizing the action drives the actor to apply physical actions to activities within the character’s dramatic situation.

Another example of physicalizing the action through the character is illustrated by examining Kate and Don’s meeting regarding the fate of the funding. In this scene, I struggled to find actions within Kate to depict the intensity of my objective. Kate walks in briskly and nervously, hoping to please Don, by saying the right things in order to continue a smooth working relationship. When Don announces that he removed the funding for The Three Sisters, I found it difficult to embrace the physical urgency of my given circumstances to meet my objective.

During rehearsal one evening, I experimented with actions that would better help me to fulfill my needed objective, “to save the theatre.” When Don said, “So it’s a real downer to have to pull the funding” (Martin 58), it triggered physical actions within me, that would help me to fight for my objective. To fight for my objective, “to save,” I chose tactics to support my fight. For example, I had “to hold back” my rage from Don. This tactic manifested physically within me. I began digging my fingertips into my binder. I curled my toes tightly inside of my shoes. I sat rigidly still and tall, with both feet planted on the floor. And I stared directly into Don’s beady eyes. These actions helped me to fight for my objective “to save,” as I embraced the physical urgency of the situation.
My physical actions encouraged me to apply other tactics. In order to try to achieve my objective, I incorporated the tactics of, “to blame,” “to fume,” and “to hide my frustration.” As this anger grew inside of me, I told myself that I could not burst; I had “to hold in” my anger, in order “to save the theatre” (my overall objective). Don would never consider funding Actors Express again if I exploded. My fingers pressed harder into my binder, turning them white and my toes did the same in my shoes. I pressed my knees together and leaned forward. As the scene progressed, my emotions followed my actions. Sometimes this scene was easy to “get into,” other times, it was difficult to find the urgency. But, as Adler says, the purpose of physicalizing the action, within the character’s given circumstances, “is to take the burden off the actor” (Adler 41).

Meisner: Application of Principles

Doing and Listening

In rehearsals for Anton in Show Business, similar to our acting classes, we were directed to carefully listen to each other. The physical act of listening goes beyond just hearing and understanding another actor’s words. Listening is an active process, where an actor allows herself to fully take-in and be affected by the received information (Felner 95). Meisner explained that “true listening,” means the actors are fully available to each other on stage (Silverberg, The Sanford Meisner Approach 9). Actors must truly listen to each other to provide a believable exchange of information in a scene, because acting is listening. Silverberg writes, that Meisner also states, “Acting is doing... Every character in every play is after something” so as actors listen carefully; in the listening, they are also doing, working toward their objectives (56).
Krasner highlights Meisner’s focus on the actor’s response to behavior: “Actors ought to observe behaviour, and in turn ‘your instinct picks up the change in [the other actor’s] behaviour and the [repetition] dialogue changes too’ (Meisner and Longwell 29-30)” (Krasner 144). Within Meisner’s repetition exercises, an actor listens with her ears, her mind, her eyes, her heart, her soul; every ounce of her being. She listens for the changes of other actors and other physical stimuli in the scene. She listens, for action, for tone of words, for another point of view; overall she listens to behavior. Meisner teaches that the “meaning is in the behavior” (Meisner and Longwell 42). By listening to behavior, the actors truthfully respond to each other. With practice, these responses become instinctual or impulsive. In his teachings of Meisner’s methods, Silverberg explains that, “If I turn myself over to my partner and instead of pushing, give up control, I get everything I need” (The Sanford Meisner Approach 9).

During the course of this production I focused on really doing and really listening. When I consciously listened to the situation and my partner on stage, it was logical and natural for me to wait for trigger behavior and words to strike and then affect me. Once they did, my reaction and reply came from a truthful and honest place.

The practice of doing and listening was evident for me in the final scene of Ben and Holly’s act two scene-series, where Holly and Ben rehearse The Three Sisters as Masha and Vershinin. One evening in rehearsal, my director asked Ellery and I to read the entire scene from which our excerpt came from. Reading this gave me a stronger sense of understanding for the underlying passion between Masha and Vershinin, while they must remain in separating realities. As an actor, I also began to understand why Chekhov’s plays made such an impact historically, in theatre. His ability to manifest
intense situations within the subtext of his scenes is quite remarkable. The crucial subtext of this scene demanded the careful listening of behavior between characters. It was clearer to me how Ben's feelings for Holly paralleled Vershinin's feelings for Masha.

As I stood behind Holly/Masha as Ben/Vershinin, I listened to her subtle movements of the head, as if to glance back at me, as she looked up at the stars. I listened to the behavior of her tensing fingers, delicately draped on the back of the chair. I listened to the soft delivery of her lines, regarding the "moaning of the chimney" (Martin 50). Hearing all of these behaviors, I, as Ben/Vershinin, began to be overwhelmed with my desire for Holly/Masha. When she glanced slightly over her shoulder, as if reaching for me, and said, "There's more light over here..." (50), my impulsive response was to move to her and profess the true feelings of love I had for her. I listened and knew my (Ben's) dramatic situation mirrored that of Vershinin's. My one chance to be with Holly was worth everything to me, worth all of the possible consequences.

I responded by impulse, lifting my chest and striding forward to where she sat. This impulse caused me to grin unstoppably. I could not hold my feelings in any longer. I responded to her invitation; "I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love" (Martin 50). I, Ben, am in love with you, Holly. The purity of my confession was momentarily beautiful. We both stood, looking into each other's eyes. We listened. Without blinking, we felt the obstacles of the circumstances enter. My impulsive response to her questioning eyes, was to look away immediately and step back. "I don't want to do this" (50). All I could think of was that I had let my guard down; I had revealed my secret. I admitted that I
love Holly! Will my world blossom or shatter? I was exposed! Holly responded by changing position to make eye contact with me again. She asked me, "Are you?" I glanced into her eyes and quickly away again. I responded, "Am I what?" She twisted my guilt a bit deeper, "In love? ... You are or you aren't." Holly's forceful tone of voice and blaming glare forced me to look straight into her eyes again. My impulse was to respond with a brave sense of confession; "I have a real life. I can hurt real people" (Martin 50). Holly, receiving this blunt statement from my straining eyes, responded with an impulse, as if to level with me. She backed up further, crossing her arms as a behavior of independent safety, and said, "And what am I, animation?" I didn't know how to respond. My response was still and unsure. I had confessed my dilemma and instead of dwelling on my reality, she threw me hers. Reading this behavior from me, she acted on impulse to explain her dilemma. My most vulnerable moment was followed by Holly's. Her confession was an impulsive response to our moment, realizing if we truly loved each other.

This was my favorite part of Ellery's work in the entire play. Holly spilled her reality of falling for the wrong guys, pacing across the stage, as if reliving each relationship. As I listened, too shocked to move, she got closer and closer to reaching complete vulnerability. Finally, Holly stopped moving, moved close to me, looked into my eyes, and said, "You see why I might be susceptible to some ordinary, straight-up guy? Okay, it's mutual" (51). At that moment Holly looked deeper into my eyes and we exchanged a knowing stare, revealing that I knew that she knew that I knew that we had fallen in love with each other. As we listened, in that moment both of us observed each other, fighting the urge to be realistic, and yet desiring each other's love above reality.
Meisner said, "The playwright gives you what to say. Your job as an actor is to fill the role with life" (Longwell and Meisner 49). If filling a role with life is your job, then you must rely on the doing and listening that manifests from the actions of the play's circumstances. Listening to all behavior and responding truthfully from the impulses you receive is the actor's overall intent.

*Communion Between Actors*

Communion was originally an element of Stanislavski's System, which involved "not only the communication between scene partners, but between the actor and himself, and between the actor and the audience" (Brestoff 129). Meisner focused and expanded on the concept of communion involving the partner. For Meisner, acting could be described as the action of "playing between bodies." For him, actors are most creative and truthful when they respond and react off of one another.

Meisner's sense of communion is evident in Brestoff's observation; "We [as actors] are beginning to see that working off a partner's response, determines our own; that the two of us are in an action-reaction dance that creates a palpable flow of energy between us" (132). The described 'action-reaction' energy between actors involves doing and listening. All components become a web of action. "Meisner was most interested in [communion] as it related to scene partners" (Brestoff 129).

Meisner's approach focuses on the relationships between actors on stage. Meisner told his students, "what you do doesn't depend on you, it depends on the other fellow" (Longwell and Meisner 52). The job of the actor is to fully react and listen to other actors within the given circumstances of the play. Communion between actors is the foundation of truthful acting. Silverberg, instructing Meisner's technique of
repetition, stated, “Our aim… is in you becoming fully available to your partner, authentically responsive in each moment” (The Sanford Meisner Approach 42-43).

As the cast of Anton in Show Business worked to listen and be available to each other on stage, our actor-to-actor relationships strengthened. Meisner’s method states, “The actor responds by acting on the stimuli, creating an ‘impulsive’ behaviour that emerges truthfully and spontaneously from reactions rather than from pre-planned behaviour” (Krasner 145). I found that in order to produce spontaneous and truthful behavior I needed to devote all of my listening, energy, and eye contact to my partner. For example, Ellery and I worked to communicate naturally by observing and responding to eye contact, tone of voice, body language, and the text. When we relied on each other and reacted off of impulse, our acting was more believable and truthful.

Ellery and I worked to strengthen our communion between each other as Holly and Jackey. Our sense of communion varied depending on the communication of our eyes, body, words, tempo, tone, and energy; all stemming from the impulse of the previous action. As our acting trust grew, as Jackey, I was able to respond with confidence to Holly’s comments. With practice our communion improved due to the understanding of the dramatic situation and our actions of doing and listening.

After arguing with me about hemming the long dress, Holly commands, “I either have legs or I walk” (Martin 44). When Holly delivered her line in a fast tempo and ended the line by scooping up to a higher pitch, my impulse reaction was to be annoyed with her. When Holly delivered her line in a slow and defiant manner, I absorbed her comment through her tone of voice and shallow body language, which produced a strong reaction of defeat for me. Through this trial and error of communal energy, we gradually
found a communication pattern that worked best for the needed actions and reactions of the scene. In the text, Jackey is supposed to be offended enough after this comment that he cries. Therefore, we consciously chose the latter example of our exchange in that moment of the scene, to produce a truthful reaction in which I truly felt compelled to cry, as she responds with, “Jackey, will you stop crying” (44).

My relationships with each actor strengthened and grew during our rehearsal process. Natasha and I found new ways to communicate the more we trusted each other as Don and Kate and as T-Anne and Kate. At the beginning of the show, checking T-Anne’s stopwatch was never the same. By listening in a focused communion with each other, the truthful impulse for the moment evolved based on our reactions to each other. And although I, as Kate, never spoke back to Kim, as Joe Bob, I reacted off impulses of her body and verbal language as she reacted to mine. The intensity of the moment and the communal energy between us drove our actions and reactions to each other. These impulsive and instinctive reactions came from truthful places and heightened the urgency, keeping the scenes fresh and believable. Meisner’s demand of reacting on impulse is challenging and yet, very crucial to truthful acting. As we made new acting discoveries between each other on stage, our dramatic situation progressed further in variety and honesty. As Meisner states, “You learn to use your instincts based on what somebody else does to you” (Meisner and Longwell 50).

Emotional Preparation

Silverberg states, “What I know about emotional preparation, in the bigger picture of the actor’s craft, is not really about “being emotional” – it is about deepening the actor’s ability and connection to what has profound meaning to him or her” (Silverberg,
Emotional Freedom 3). Meisner believed that emotional material on stage had to have true meaning for the actor. He also believed that the imagination was a vast and highly, underused gift for creating this meaning. Silverberg agrees with Meisner, that compared to affective memory, “if all we know how to do is use actual past events, we are restricted in our ability to work. But our imagination is infinite!” (21). Meisner instructed his actors and students that in order to create true emotion using imagination, “the circumstance must be imaginary and it must always be based on an element of truth... Without the element of truth, there is no way for that imaginary circumstance to take root in you” (23).

Kate’s scene at Lisabette’s door vividly came alive for me, halfway through our rehearsal process. One night at rehearsal, with my director’s guidance, I found an emotional preparation that allowed me to be vulnerable in the scene and truthful in the emotion. I, as Kate, approached Lisabette’s door late at night with all of the courage I had. Not only did I “ask” Lisabette to break the professional wall between producer and actor, but I also asked her to “drink red wine with me and make love” (Martin 35). In this moment, Kate let all of her defenses down, sharing her secret of sexual orientation and the fact that she is attracted to Lisabette and wants to spend a sexual evening with this young woman whom she finds irresistible.

First of all, I tried to indulge into Kate’s reality, making the situation as urgent as I could imagine. I defined for myself that I (as Kate) am lonely, I haven’t had a lover of any kind for at least five years, I am very attracted to Lisabette personally and sexually to the point that I cannot act normally when she’s in the same room, I am very guarded about my sexuality anyway because of my position in the community of San Antonio,
and I am socially challenged in any situation, as I often freeze and allow the opposing person to walk all over me, whether I’m right or not. After solidifying exactly what Kate was going through emotionally, I added an imagined situation that was meaningful to me, as Meisner suggests, that helped me as the actor, to personalize this scene. My imagined situation looked something like this.

I had spent a summer living between two cities, due to overlapping show performance and rehearsal schedules. One night, I stayed at my male friend’s apartment alone. I imagined that my friend was Lisabette, the object of my attraction and that he had another woman in his bedroom that I didn’t know about.

“The movie in my mind” depicted me knocking on his bedroom door with all the courage I could find to confess my feelings for him. When I spoke, he waited in an awkward silence and finally answered that he was making love to another woman at that moment. The embarrassment and shame slapped me in the face! With one knock, I had destroyed many relationships. I had confessed that I had feelings for him, while having a serious boyfriend, I had interrupted his sexual activities, and I had demolished our friendship and my own dating relationship. In a series of five seconds in my “movie,” I had ruined two important relationships and knew this event would create awkward tension for years to come! I had also bruised my heart after trying to be vulnerable and honest by sharing my heightened feelings. I had chosen to parallel my imagined situation with Kate’s situation, but the situation was imagined and the elements of truth were my friend and myself.

My emotional preparation involved creating and combining imagery and heightened details. As I waited back stage to enter, I sat on the floor in the darkest corner
I could find backstage. I closed my eyes and relived my imaginary movie. The more I used my senses and defined detailed images in my mind, the more I believed in the dilemma I had imagined. Even though most nights, the audience was full of laughter during this part of the show, their response did not overcome my concentration. As Kate, I honestly felt awkward emotions of the situation stemming from the awkward emotions of my imagined situation. I also used my paraphrasing method to rewrite my lines internally, to parallel the meaning of my lines, externally. Because it was so vivid and personal, it became one of my favorite scenes as an actor. I had found a way to personalize and control a scene with given circumstances unlike any situation I, personally had ever experienced.

In my last scene of the show, I also applied Meisner’s emotional preparation approach. During Holly’s exit lines, as she avoided eye contact with me, I began to personalize the scene. I imagined that my current boyfriend had just been offered the top professional position for his career. This meant that I would not see him for seven straight months out of the year, because he would be in training all over the country. I imagined that he had proposed and we were planning our life together when he received the offer. This announcement of opportunity shut all hopes for any future together. He barely acknowledged that our doors were closing. All of a sudden, it did not bother him that he would be losing me. I imagined me reluctantly smiling and congratulating him, showing that I was happy for him and proud of him. And then I imagined that I didn’t know what to do, and finally, out of desperation as a last hope, I asked him to “stay.” I knew he wouldn’t and he knew he wouldn’t. I was angry, hurt, slightly jealous, lost and now betrayed. I kept wondering if I would forgive him.
In the scene, as Holly tried to convince me (as Ben) to forget about her and about us, at first I also felt her comments within my imagined situation. As Meisner teaches, I had set my “element of truth” in an extreme situation and the full emotion that resulted affected me. As Holly’s dialogue progressed, I focused on listening to her, in a moment-to-moment fashion, instead of dwelling in my imagined situation (Silverberg, *Emotional Freedom* 60-61).

As Holly left the room for the last time, her only gesture in my direction was a glance. To make it worse, the last thing she said was, “Want to know the really worst part? I-am-so-happy!” (Martin 67). As I stared out the rehearsal door, as if I could still see her, I tried to feel and guess what might come next. I would never see her again. What now? As Casey and Lisabette spoke to me, I didn’t have to think much. I was taking in what had just happened. This was another moment of the show that the character played me. I knew I could trust whatever actions and reactions came from me. I knew they were real and that they expressed what Ben needed to express. Finally, I looked over at the two for the first time in that beat and said my final line, “Thanks” (67). I grabbed my hat and put it on my head as I sauntered out.

I found Meisner’s emotional preparation technique very applicable for transitioning from one character to another. *Anton in Show Business* presented me with the unique challenge of playing multiple characters in the production. In the beginning of our rehearsal process, character transitioning was not an issue. We rehearsed select scenes each night, but always in the fashion of working each scene repetitively until progressive improvements were made for the specific rehearsal objectives. When we began to run full acts without stopping to repeat scenes, I realized that these transitions
would not only be a challenge for costume changing, but I would need to find a way to jump to a very different set of circumstances based on the needs of the oncoming character. The quick changes and circumstances of the transition became my emotional preparation.

One of my quick costume changes out of Ben and into Kate, especially helped me to embrace Kate again, after dwelling in Ben. As I rushed to tuck my blouse into my skirt and put my earrings on, I felt flustered and insecure as Kate often feels. With literally one second to spare, I walked into Don’s office hoping to please him yet again, so he would continue to fund our theatrical endeavors. This preparation of panic stirred my emotions as Kate, helping me into her circumstances.

In this final example, my actor action off-stage became my emotional preparation for the scene. My fastest costume and character change was the transition into my final scene, from Kate to Ben. After my final exit as Kate, I wanted to live in Kate’s circumstances further. That feeling of connection with character is like a drug. I wanted it to stay within me. Unfortunately, I had eleven short lines to change into Ben. But, as an actor, I had to use what I was given and make it work. As I ran from back stage right, I began to undress Kate and think about where Ben was coming from as he ran into the studio, hoping with all of his soul, to find Holly. Conversing with my dressers helped me to step away from Kate’s bitterness and into Ben’s urgency.

As I entered, I had usually just buckled my belt, my jeans had been pulled over my boots and my hat had been quickly placed onto my head. The quick change had messed my hair a bit and had made me slightly out of breath, which turned into Ben’s circumstances. As I ran in from audience left, I had about ten feet to enter, so I imagined
myself hopping out of my pick-up that I had barely parked, running into the building, ripping off my hat, turning right and then left into the rehearsal room... thankfully to find Holly still there. “Stay” (Martin 62). That’s all I could think of to say at first. I spoke my objective. That’s what I wanted. I want Holly to stay – I want you to stay. Not only did this transition become a personal challenge for me, but it also became a clever preparation device that I could use every time. It was physical and vocal and involved imagery, making it a supported preparation.

Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner were all correct. For my use and understanding, their methods are strong and effective. I don’t believe that actors must choose a method to use consistently. I believe the acting technique should be chosen and applied based on which technique or combination of techniques works best in the given situation, as the given character, in the given actor’s mind.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Assessment of My Application of Methods

In conclusion, I believe I have grown as an honest and truthful actor because of my approach to my roles of Kate, Ben, and Jackey in *Anton in Show Business*, through the application of the acting methods of Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner. By conducting this study in conjunction with a real performance experience, I found it was beneficial to know that I was applying principles of acting methods directly to roles that would be tested before a live audience. My application of principles during rehearsals was often a conscious effort, but sometimes it was purely accidental. Those moments of accidental, personal discovery are glorious events in acting. Most of the time however, the trial and error process of rehearsal strengthened my application of these principles, as I worked side by side with my fellow actors, to grow in my craft.

The practice of writing out and defining essential given circumstances, objectives, and super-objectives for my characters, as well as describing physical characteristics and character relationships provided me with crucial understanding and information for fulfilling my characters’ objectives in the play. The application of communication techniques and personalization methods strengthened the fulfillment of my characters’ actions as well.
I feel my richest area of growth as an actor was in my exploration of personalization, using Strasberg’s technique of affective memory, Adler’s technique of imagination, and Meisner’s technique of emotional preparation. I was able to experiment with and use a personalization technique from each of the three acting methods I applied. This not only offered me a versatile experience, but also allowed me to approach each of my characters using the emotional personalization method that best fit each character’s given situation. Emotional preparation and personalization methods are newest to me as an actor; therefore their incorporation offered me the most personal growth.

I also feel that I made discoveries in the areas of Strasberg’s select principles of relaxation and concentration, Adler’s select principles of given circumstances and action, and Meisner’s select principles of doing and listening and communion between actors. My experience in the production of *Anton in Show Business* became a living experiment in which I could test my application of these principles of prominent acting methods.

Actors must always assess themselves, not during, but before and after rehearsals and after performances, to find areas to improve upon. Often times, they are their own teachers. I must continue my work in the areas of the select principles of Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner that I now understand and can apply to my future acting experiences. I sense when I am consciously trying to control my performance, instead of listening to my partner on stage. With the practice of using Meisner’s method in class, I feel *Anton in Show Business* has helped me to improve in this area.

Strong and old habits are hard to change and correct. I discovered the importance of warming up prior to rehearsals and performances. After experiencing the relaxation and concentration that results from a warm-up procedure, I can further train myself to
focus on other acting principles. I also want to focus on physicalizing my actions within
the circumstances of the character. From character actions, I feel I can develop more
flexibility and versatility of physical movement, vocal variety, and creative action
choices, while also applying varying levels of energy, rhythm, and tempo for different
characters.

The select principles I chose to focus on, mixed together within me, building my
own living, changing, and growing acting method. Listening relates to relaxation and
concentration. Knowing this, I also must consciously focus on finding a working
relationship of relaxation and concentration that works for me, so that I am prepared to
listen, take-in, adjust, and respond to impulses. If I ask myself to throw out the tensions
of my personal life and consciously remove physical stress and tension from my body
through stretching, respiration, balance, and vocal exercises, then I am ready to
concentrate on the objectives of my character and all relationships within the play.

Physicalizing a character within the action of the play is still a challenge for me.
It is difficult for me to channel my physical body, voice, and energy into a character’s
action of the play. Some of my gestures and actions are well justified by the given
circumstances of the character and the play; other gestures and physical movements are
not. I find myself analyzing what I am doing physically, which means I am thinking and
not doing.

The use of multiple methods was especially helpful during the production process
of Anton in Show Business, because I played multiple characters in very different, yet
important situations. The application of certain principles worked better for different
characters, at different dramatic points throughout the play. When the stage situation:
changed, often it was helpful to apply a different principle from a different method. I discovered that the application of a personalization technique could be selected to fit the emotional demands of the character in a given scene.

I am privileged and proud to state that I have grown as an honest and truthful actor because of my conscious application of these acting methods to my character approach for *Anton in Show Business*. Although, I have many miles to further develop my acting, I have grown because of this theatrical experience. The select principles of the acting methods of Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner that I researched and applied to this production, will positively impact my acting in the future. Their application will assist me as I continuously develop my personal acting method, striving each time to produce honest and truthful acting.
APPENDIX A

Character Biography – Katrina (Kate) Todoravskia

*Anton in Show Business* – Jane Martin, 2000

University of North Dakota, Performance 2007

Given Circumstances – Extended

Katrina (Kate) Todoravskia is the producer director of the theatre company, Actor’s Express, in San Antonio, Texas. Her current project is helping with the audition process and management of the artistic team for the production of Anton Chekhov’s *The Three Sisters*. She is forty-two years old, lives alone but not by choice, and after a lifetime in academia she now manages her own theatre company, Actor’s Express. She was the only one who applied for the position, unbeknownst to her, and was willing to relocate to San Antonio. Kate wants the best directors and actors she can possibly find for her company and the artistic growth of her community; even though most residents don’t attend or understand the plays that Actor’s Express produces.

She grew up in suburban Connecticut, where her parents still reside. She has one brother, younger by six years, whom she rarely sees. Her parents travel most of the time and “check-in” with their children when it’s convenient, which means approximately twice a year.

Kate attended an upscale, “Ivy League-feeder” high school and continued on to attend Stanford, Harvard, and Yale, in that order. Kate tried dating in her early college
years, but it never seemed to work very well. All of her relationship attempts ended because of her constant drive for academics and an anal-retentive desire to be as close to the "perfect scholar" as possible. Secretly, Kate is secretly confused, regarding her sexual orientation, and finds deep desires within her that she doesn't quite understand and can't fully repress or express.

Academics and theatre are the two areas she knows. She is far too "type-A" to be an actor. But she is very passionate about both and discovered that managing Actor's Express was a fitting situation and challenge for her to satisfy both areas. She has been with the company for thirteen years.
Character Biography – Ben Shipwright (Vershinin)

*Anton in Show Business* – Jane Martin, 2000

University of North Dakota, Performance 2007

Given Circumstances – Extended

Ben Shipwright currently lives in San Antonio with his wife Lisa and two kids, Avery and Tyson. Ben is thirty-six years old, and also happens to be a regionally, famous country singer. He grew up in a smaller rural community outside of San Antonio, where his parents still reside. He has one older sister and three younger siblings. As a teenager, he spent lots of time playing in a country-rock band with his buddies. Ben became the lead singer and guitar player replacing his buddy Tom, because Tom’s family moved when they were both sixteen. Given this opportunity, to his surprise, Ben was a natural. His sensitivity to the lyrics of a song evolved overnight. Their small garage-band played a mix of ‘covers’ and Ben’s originals for several community and school events, and eventually, for some wedding dances in the area. After high school, Ben attempted college. He actually survived three years before finally dropping out. Fortunately, the music theory he picked up was helpful to the continued progress of his career. Ben’s original songs are based on his own improvised melodies. He has help arranging his music for the rest of the band, as he primarily plays by ear.
When he’s not recording music, he’s “playing dad” or he’s working part time as a carpenter. As a day job, he helps his friend, Pete build houses. Lately, he’s been quite successful with his recordings, making the “Top 50 Country” singles chart. He’s had some calls in the last year, from record companies wanting him to write and record more regularly. He is able to record in San Antonio for a smaller company, but feels torn, to consider pursuing a recording contract with a larger company. He would love to but knows his family needs him. His wife has a serious illness and his children are young. Deep down, Ben knows he will try the big companies some day.

Ben does some acting for the community theatre company of Actor’s Express. His first role was a fill-in for an actor who left the show two days before they opened Neil Simon’s The Odd Couple. The community knows Ben primarily for his music and his soft-spoken personality. Everyone he knows in the city was surprised to see him let loose and play the role of Felix. He secretly loves the sense of release that acting offers him. Playing a stage-character comes easily to him because he is a simple-minded person. He doesn’t have to fight past, extra complexities that cloud the mind and creativity of most.
APPENDIX C

Character Biography – Jackey, costume designer

_Anton in Show Business_ – Jane Martin, 2000

University of North Dakota, Performance 2007

_Given Circumstances – Extended_

Jackey, currently thirty-two years old, works as a professional costume designer in the San Antonio and Houston areas. He is originally from Los Angeles, where he did lots of costuming work for the film industry. His costume designing expertise is actually costuming thin, tall, women: which explains how he knows Holly. He has a special passion for designing costumes for classical plays that allow him to create and “doctor up” large costume pieces, full of different textures of material. Initially, he followed his ex-boyfriend, Philip, to San Antonio. Although he misses L.A. and the costume departments miss him; he is happy in Texas and feels he is able to explore different repertoire. Among friends and co-workers, Jackey is known for his positive attitude and positive outlook on life.

Jackey has been costuming since early high school. He was the fourth child of five and grew up being “Mama’s sewing-helper.” His dad was at the office or gone on work trips so often that he didn’t realize two of his four sons were gay until they graduated from high school. He doesn’t visit home or talk to family members, except for his mother, whom he talks to and writes to regularly. The city of L.A. and an
independent-upbringing taught him much about life in a hurry. He is very street-smart and digests large concepts with clear understanding and an eloquent verbal interpretation. His writing is also incredibly focused and organized.

Jackey is very accustomed to dealing with divas. He reads the minds of the women he costumes with natural intuition. By saying the right things at the right time and by playing the right countering personality, he is able to get them to wear anything he or the director wants. Deep down, Jackey feels sorry for these insecure, borderline anorexic women. Part of the fulfillment of his job is making these women feel good about themselves and their appearance, even if only for a short time.

He thinks fast and works fast. Directors love working with him and love his costuming products. Kate knows she is fortunate to have him on-call in San Antonio. Wikewitch gathers that he is a talented and intelligent costume designer based on the fact that Jackey convinces Holly to wear Masha’s dress with a complex, yet clear description of Chekhov’s underlying meaning of the text.
APPENDIX D

OBJECTIVES – THROUGH-LINE OF ACTION

During the first rehearsals of Anton in Show Business, we, as a cast were asked to define the super-objective or through-line of action for the play. With the assistance of T-Anne's introductory monologue, we decided that the overarching through-line of action of the play was "to depict the current state of American regional theatre." My character's through-lines of action or commonly referred to as, super-objectives, evolved as we continued to analyze and rehearse. "We use the word super-objective to characterize the essential idea, the core, which provided the impetus for the writing of a play" (An Actor's Handbook 137). All objectives should add up and be focused on achieving the super-objective. This drives the action of the character throughout the life of the play. "The super-objective controls each character's logic of actions" (Moore 49).

Kate's super-objective is: to please the actors, directors, and community with The Three Sisters. Ben's super-objective is: to win Holly's love. Jackey's super-objective is: to convince Holly to wear the dress.

Through the improvisation and application in rehearsal, as my objectives and super-objectives evolved, I gradually understood the role of each of my characters within the through-line of action of the play. Kate demonstrates the reality of regional theatre managers, Ben demonstrates the reality of regional theatre actors, and Jackey demonstrates the reality of regional theatre support staff and designers. Again,
Stanislavski reminded his students, “The inner line of effort that guides the actors from the beginning to the end of the play we call continuity or the through-going action” (*An Actor’s Handbook* 145).

For each of my three characters, I will describe, in first-person, their objectives in *Anton in Show Business*. Then I will describe some of their overarching qualities, in third-person. From these explanations, their character super-objective and through-line of action will be defined.

**KATE**

I think with extremely high intentions of succeeding at whatever I put my mind to. Realistically, I know that my efforts will be overtaken. I am stepped on and taken advantage of, because I’m usually too nice. People may think that I am unaware, but I do notice and I am hurt. My major objectives for *The Three Sisters* are: to draw a receptive audience from the community, to profit from the production, and to inspire audience members with Anton Chekhov’s work. I want to “sell” this show: to the actors, to the director, and to the community. I also want to “sell” Actor’s Express, my theatre company, to the actors, to the director, and to the community. I want to inspire the people who work for me on this production with my love for Chekhov and my love of theatre at Actor’s Express. I want to avoid conflict and confrontation with my actors, staff, and board members. I want to demand that rehearsals and meetings run smoothly. Overall, throughout this project, I want to please. I want to please my actors, please my hired director/s, please my board, please my corporate sponsor, and somehow, ultimately please myself.
Kate's “aim to please” personality is evident in the text and the through action of the play. For running a theatre company for thirteen years, in San Antonio, she has done very well. She has made Actor’s Express her life. She will do almost anything for the success of the theatre company. For example, Kate changes the mission of the theatre to fit the artistic goals of each new director for The Three Sisters. She is also very careful and quick to please when dealing with the Board (Joe Bob Mattingly), the corporate sponsor (Don Blount), and the eccentric directors: Ralph Brightly (light-hearted, shallow approach), Andwyneth Wyore (multi-cultural new works that impress/stun the audience, no script – just continuous references to the ‘race-question’ approach) and Wikewitch Konalkvis (deep, heavy, true to Chekhov, dramatic approach). She tries to please them by completely allowing them to approach and direct The Three Sisters using their personal vision, despite the mission of the theatre company. Kate even tiptoes around film actress, Holly Seabe, because she knows the company ultimately needs to use Holly’s name to sell enough tickets to make the substantial profit to take care of debts, pay the actors and director, please the board, and simply to stay open.

She strives to demonstrate to her directors, board, and actors that she is “on top of her game.” She absolutely thrives on being the leader and the spokesperson. She wants to affect others, wants to be looked to as wise and all knowing, and wants to lead using her theatre experience. She strives to be profound, especially during her speeches to directors and cast. Her speeches have such potential: they are almost amazing (in her point of view). They are certainly full of energy and sincerity, but they really don’t go anywhere and they are way too long! Kate avoids conflict, yet it often lands in her lap. She finds herself stuck between the directors and actors of The Three Sisters. As she
crumbles under these conflicts, the outcome creates more work for her. No matter what, she wants this production to succeed.

Kate does not achieve her super-objective of “pleasing everyone.” It is impossible due to personalities, obstacles, and conflicts out of her control. I do believe that Kate, to some degree, please’s herself in her last scene. After being fired, she tells Lisabette, Casey, and Holly: “I think I hate theatre. It makes you think it was about something when it was actually only about yourself. It fascinates you. It seduces you. It leaves you penniless by the side of the road. Screw Thespis. Run for your lives!” (Martin 61-62). She is finally honest with herself. Kate’s through-line of action is “I want to please everyone: the actors, directors, and community, with my production of The Three Sisters.” In the end, her ‘aim to please’ efforts finally fall to reality.

BEN

I approach events in life the same way I approach my music. I am simply myself. If creativity motivates me to genius... great! Otherwise, I live to experience life and find the beauty in it. I think of myself as a gentleman and take care of the things I have and find. I’m relaxed in most situations and not many things upset me. I work hard and I am kind to everyone because I feel it is the right way to be. I want to play my part well in The Three Sisters. I want to avoid Holly’s advances, although I find her extremely attractive and exciting. I want to maintain my integrity. I want to confront Holly about our obvious feelings toward each other. In order to remain faithful, I want to push Holly away. After trying to suppress my feelings for Holly, I want to confess my infatuation and later my love for her. To be responsible for my actions, I want to confess to my wife that I have fallen for another woman. I want to search my heart and soul to find out if
this love I feel, between Holly and I, is meant to be. I want to profess my love for Holly. I want to convince Holly that she can trust me. I want Holly to stay. Ultimately, I want to win Holly’s love.

Ben does love Holly. But love in a relationship must be two-sided. He can love, but aches to be loved in return. This drives Ben’s through-line of action from being interested in Holly, to being infatuated with her, and then completely consumed by his love for her. He can’t function normally. Finally his search for her love turns into tunnel-vision desperation. Holly confesses that she loves Ben after their night together. But, unfortunately for Ben, her feelings are short-lived. He lives solitarily on the slightest chance of hope that her love for him will survive. At this point, Ben gives up everything he has in life: his marriage, his family, the integrity of his career, and his life as he knows it. Then, Holly leaves, not caring that she also leaves Ben with nothing and without love. In the end, Ben does not win his super-objective. He does not win Holly’s love.

JACKEY

I am an artist and I design costumes. I am proud of the work I do. I have always created artistic things. I want to inspire those I encounter with my creativity. I not only enjoy costume designing as an outlet for my art, but it is also my career. I also love to dig into the plays that I costume. I read and research avidly. I was raised with a realistic and worldly view of most issues. I look to the big picture and also scrape for the details. I want to please Actor’s Express by designing detailed and fully thought-through costumes. I want to run things smoothly. I want the actors to trust me and my work. I want the actors to feel comfortable and proud wearing my costumes. I want to impress
the director and actors with my work. I want to avoid problems with personalities. I want to convince Holly to wear the dress that I have specifically designed and sewn for her as Masha. I want to flatter her, so that she will agree to wear the dress. I want to level with her by explaining why she must wear the dress. I want to affect her with a deeper undertone of meaning for wearing the dress. I want to confuse her with a lengthy metaphorical explanation for her role in the play. I want to convince her to wear the dress.

Through the entire opening scene of act two, it is evident that Jackey is passionate about his costume designs. He does want to please the directors and actors, but he also wants them to respect him as an artist. In order to get Holly to trust him and wear the dress that he has made, he utilizes a series of tactics. These tactics create an arc of action that begins with a conflict, climbs to confrontation, reaches a climax, and resolves in victory. First he analyzes Holly’s opinion, sensing that she is unsure about her appearance in the dress. Then he flatters her, telling her how beautiful she looks in it. Then Jackey tries to guilt her into thinking that she has hurt his feelings. When this approach fails, he expands on the true beauty of her character and how the dress emulates this beauty. This tactic confuses her at first, and then affects her. At the end of the scene, Jackey wins his super-objective. Jackey convinces Holly to wear the dress.
APPENDIX E

CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS

Actors must first read the script and define their “active facts.” After finding and defining specific given circumstances, and establishing initial objectives, an actor must know how he or she relates to other characters in the play. He or she must allow these character relationships to affect him or her personally. Moore states, “An actor must establish relationships with other characters. He must know how he feels about everything in the play and must have active, sharp reactions to everybody and to everything” (62). I continued to construct my characters, by defining each character’s relationship with all other characters they are connected to in the play.

KATE: Relationship with Others

Ralph Brightly – Kate and Ralph are theatre pals from their college years. They attended several theatre management conventions together, mostly due to the fact that Harvard has a direct tie to Ralph’s university in London. Kate, most often, seeks outside directors for the productions of Actor’s Express. She was getting desperate trying to find a director for The Three Sisters and called on an old friendship.

Andwenyth Wyore – Kate and Andwenyth are both theatre company managers in San Antonio who also happened to attend Stanford, Harvard, and Yale at the same time. They have worked together on certain community theatre projects. Andwenyth is also a well-known dynamic and abrasive director. Kate knew if she changed the mission
statement of Actor’s Express, she could convince Andwenyth to direct. Andwenyth is very controlling and opinionated compared to Kate who is passive and naïve.

Wikewitch Konalkvis – Kate had to work hard to convince her board to hire Wikewitch, famous Polish Chekhov director. Kate used her Harvard connections to convince Wikewitch to travel to Texas to direct *The Three Sisters*, his favorite Chekhov script.

Kate is intimidated by the caliber of his work, so keeps her distance when it comes to directing choices.

Casey, Lisabette, Holly – Kate’s main issue with the “sisters” is controlling them in front of directors and sponsors. Casey respects Kate simply because she holds the title of ‘producer.’ Casey is perceptive enough to sense Kate’s inhibitions and insecurities, therefore most of what Kate says, Casey ignores.

Holly knows her name is important to the success of the production and therefore, knows she can get away with anything. Kate keeps a certain distance from Holly in order to avoid awkward tension and more of her unnecessary demands.

Lisabette also respects Kate and her position with the theatre company. Deep down Kate is very attracted to Lisabette and is thankful for her attentiveness during meetings and rehearsals (otherwise, no one listens to Kate).

Ben – He knows Kate is the producer, so he simply lets her conduct business and chooses not to interfere or offer any opinions; it’s not worth her long-winded explanation.

T-Anne – Surprisingly, T-Anne and Kate have a supportive working relationship. They trust each other to take care of business issues as they arise. Thankfully for Kate, T-Anne is laid-back enough to tolerate Kate’s obsessive-compulsiveness. They’ve worked together for ten years and they know how each other works.
Don Blount – Kate is extremely careful around Don. Because of his crucial and irreplaceable financial support, Kate lets Don lead their meetings, so she can assure his constant financial support for Actor’s Express. Kate is afraid of Don and the chance of upsetting him.

Joe Bob Mattingly – Kate is very tentative around Joe Bob. She is careful to say “the things” that her board members want to hear. Kate knows that Joe Bob is a stubborn, rich Texan who hates theatre and only contributes because the “wife on his arm” enjoys the arts. Together they seek the social praise of appearing artistically connected. When possible, Kate avoids contact with Joe Bob, at all costs.

BEN: Relationship with others

Kate Todoravskia – Ben knows that Kate works hard and needs male actors from the community to fill frequent casting demands. As long as his schedule allows, he is willing to help her out, playing whatever part is needed. Ben doesn’t let any of Kate’s obsessive qualities bother him.

T-Anne – Ben appreciates T-Anne’s work, especially her attention to crucial technical tasks that often go unnoticed. Sometimes they enlighten each other in conversation focusing on technical and construction techniques. Ben has helped build the set for several productions.

Wikewitch – It does not matter to Ben who directs the play. Ben is intrigued by Wikewitch. Ben has not spent much time outside of Texas, so working with someone from Poland is purely an amusing novelty. He enjoys listening to Wikewitch’s accent and marvels at his style of directing. It is very different than anything he has ever been exposed to.
Casey – Ben respects Casey for all of her theatre experience. He understands that she is very talented, but without much to compare her to, she is just another actress to him.

Lisabette – Ben likes Lisabette’s energy and personality. He is sincerely flattered when she recognizes him as one of her favorite country singers. He likes having the comradery of another Texan in the show.

Holly – Ben is baffled by his sudden feelings for Holly. He has always loved his wife. But now, suddenly a provocative, beautiful, and mysterious woman from the famous city of Los Angeles enters his thoughts and heart. Other women have never really tempted him. When they first meet, he is initially confused by her questions and does not comprehend what he is feeling until later that week. Ben is so accustomed to having his feet firmly on the ground, that his sudden feelings for Holly catch him off guard. He does not know what to think or how to react to her. The on-stage romance of Vershinin and Masha certainly heightens his feelings further. He never expected to, but he is falling “head over heels” for this woman. Holly represents his longing for a dangerous love: feelings for an erotic, devastatingly beautiful, and sensuous woman. His thoughts progress quickly to sexual passions, and he finds that he cannot remove her from his thoughts. He tries to explain his feelings for her first through song and when that fails, he simply tries conversation. The scenes with intimate feelings shared between Masha and Vershinin are torture for Ben. He decides to confront Holly about the attractive-awkwardness between them. Shortly after this conversation, he cannot hold back anymore; lust takes over and his sexual passions drive him to Holly. He struggles internally, trying to find his conscience. Finally, he gives in to her seduction. In doing this, he gives up all he has for Holly. He knows that he honestly loves her. When Holly
leaves him, he is devastated. When she physically walks away, deep down, he knows this is what he expected all along. But, he also knows he could not have stopped himself anyway. Since he has given up everything that he previously lived for, he decides this would be a good time to give his music career the attention it has never had. Ben leaves for Nashville: hurt and lost... yet free.

JACKEY: Relationship with others

Holly – Jackey likes Holly’s performance work. He finds it difficult though to appreciate her as a civil human being. He thinks she is more selfish and spoiled than she needs to be. He is confident that her beauty is creatively displayed best by wearing his costumes. Jackey is secretly annoyed with her whining. He is personally offended when she makes fun of the dress he has designed and constructed especially to flatter her. He knows he is much smarter than Holly and uses this to his advantage. He knows he only has to please and flatter her enough to convince her to wear the dress. Having worked with many ‘divas’, he is skilled in the art of using creative tactics to get them to willingly agree to his designing requests and demands. For him, Holly is just another diva who presents him with the challenge of using his insight and creativity to convince her to wear the dress. He loves a challenge.

Wikewitch – Jackey respects Wikewitch as a world-famous director of Chekhov plays. Jackey knows what Chekhov requires. He respects Wikewitch for his attention to detail and the play’s crucial subtext. Jackey likes people who are strong advocates for what they believe and for what they do. This being said, Jackey naturally respects the wisdom and creativity of this old, Polish director. He wants to please and also impress Wikewitch, assuring him that he also knows what Chekhov demands.
APPENDIX F

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: PHYSICAL, VOCAL, IMAGERY

Sonia Moore supports Stanislavski by writing; “The quality of an actor’s performance depends not only upon the creation of the inner life of a role but also upon the physical embodiment of it” (52). She goes on to say, “An actor’s own organism is his instrument. Actions are his material.” For my characters, Kate, Ben, and Jackey, I persevered to explore and demonstrate physical and vocal qualities that would suit the needs of each character. Much of my initial characteristics evolved into other renditions of character attributes. Within this experimentation period came several moments of “character clarity.” Allowing the inner character to dissolve into the physical or outer character will always be one of my main objectives for characterization. Moore clarifies this idea by stating: “It is important for an actor to see the character he builds in terms of actions” (55). She also states: “A character, according to Stanislavski, is the flesh and the soul of the actor and is born of the union of all spiritual and physical elements of the role and the actor” (Moore 60).

For each of my three characters, I will describe the physical and vocal qualities I envisioned. I will also explain the inspiration for the evolution of my characters as I began my character analysis and exploration.
KATE

Kate appears confident, put-together, elegant at times, classy at times, and professional. From an outside, distant view, Kate can appear snobbish and aloof. She is 5'6" and slender, yet oddly proportioned. She walks in a hurried fashion taking small but quick steps while wearing heals. She has long, stringy hair that she slicks back tightly into a professional-looking twist. She emits an air of professionalism, refined confidence, and control. To parallel this eminence, she also can be perceived as insecure, repetitive, random, and indecisive. These images occur especially when she is listening to someone of authority or if she is unsure how to answer a question. She often carries a binder or a clipboard and a pencil (not a pen), whether she needs them or not.

Kate’s vocal range is medium-low, similar to an alto. Her voice naturally escalates in pitch, climbing a bit higher when she is truly excited about the topic she’s addressing.

Building the Character: In the earlier stages of character development, my director and I had spoke of Kate as a rambling speaker, excessively gesticulating and verbalizing. The inspiration for this characterization idea was drawn from her awkward explanation of the mission of Actor’s Express in act one. In developing the delivery of this statement, I worked with my words building up passion and meaning so much within me, that I just had to release the built up energy through gestures and accompanying vocals.

As Kate evolved further, she became more serious, seeking control yet failing to gain control. To help physicalize her rigidity, I started wearing a skirt and heels for rehearsals and used my binder and pencil as my props. This helped me to absorb her
physically. To help myself find an image of Kate, I substituted myself into the life of a former director of mine, Maribeth Swalley. She was the artistic director for the Fire Hall Theatre in Grand Forks, ND, for several years when I was young. She had an artistic drive for the theatre she produced. However, to strengthen the physical image and personality I pictured for her, I added the passionate banter of another director of mine, Sheryl Elshaug Dorsher. Sheryl’s verbal passion and Maribeth’s drive were the inspiration behind my rant as Kate, giving her ‘moving’ speech about the mission of “Actor's Express.”

To justify Kate’s character in this scene, I imagined this dual figure preaching to her new cast; completely enthralled in the mission of her theatre, not caring what others thought of her speech, and oblivious to their reactions and body language. Using this imaginary model, I poured my heart out to let my new cast know how lucky they were to be working for Actor’s Express. I was so indulged and in love with my mission that I couldn’t quite find the words to justify it’s true meaning, which prompted the extra verbiage. As the actor, if ever my mind strayed from the urgency of Kate’s speech, I just pictured an image of Sheryl and Maribeth and I was back on track.

I experienced another strong image of Maribeth for Kate later in act two. As I sat down to visit with Don Blount about the progress of our production, I imagined myself running the Fire Hall Theatre and having a similar funding meeting. Then I imagined that the board became very close-minded and cold. Images of Maribeth came swimming back to me. I used her boldness to keep myself (as Kate) feisty and tense in my chair. Maribeth filled me with her love for theatre and her disgust for business people like Don who didn’t have any understanding of the arts or any desire to support art with their
multi-million-dollar budgets. Dropping ten thousand dollars into a theatre fund would be like losing a quarter under the rug. With her image, I still imagined that it was me that owned and ran the theatre and made sure ends were met after each production. I saw myself working late at night on programs or the budget or painting the lobby.

When Don turned to me and said, “So it’s a real downer to have to pull the funding.” I was speechless (Martin 58). Without funding, our ‘art’ was not even remotely possible. I can’t pay the actors, the stage manager, the technical crew, or the director, let alone myself. This show cannot go on without this bastard, tobacco-seller’s money. The more I internalized this impact and its potential consequences for Actor’s Express, the better I held on to my complete tension. My inner monologue was something like this... “This clueless, rich bastard doesn’t realize or care that pulling the funding means the end of my show, my job, my life, everything I have built upon since college. Thirteen years of cultivating this company! Now, nothing!? Because this newbe didn’t check on a company policy change... or so he says!? Ahhhhh. I hate him. I can’t believe he can be so heartless. He’ll go home tonight to a big supper and bottle of wine. I’ll go home to break my mirrors, pack my bags, and eat glass!”

Out of the three characters I played, Kate was the character that I could most readily imagined dialogues, images, and circumstances too. She is also the character that I did most of my trial and error with, regarding characteristic qualities and emotional preparation. 

BEN

Ben’s appearance is simple. He most often wears jeans, an attractive-looking button-up shirt, and his stonewashed jean jacket. He accompanies his ‘look’ by wearing
his cowboy boots and his favorite cowboy hat, always. He’s slender, about 5’10”, and
has dark brown, scraggly hair. Ben’s appearance is only altered by his choice of jeans.
One style of jeans is for construction work and the other is for his country music
performances and recording. He most often, emits a relaxed and confident aura. He’s
rarely in a hurry and he swaggers along leading with his knees.

Ben’s vocal range is medium-low, similar to a baritone. He can sing tenor with
decent conviction, but is more comfortable in the middle of his range. He speaks with a
warm and booming tone that resonates in most rooms. If he is really serious or
passionate about something, his speaking pitch drops approximately two full steps.

Building the Character: Ben’s physicalization and vocalization primarily came
from my recent experience playing Annie in Annie Get Your Gun at Fort Totten Little
Theatre, south of Devils Lake, ND. Because of my role, my Southern dialect was
reinforced during the production. I imagined Frank Butler swaggering on stage, lifting
his hat to greet the ladies. This image along with the soft, charismatic, vocal tones of
Buffalo Bill, molded me into character, as Ben. With Frank’s image and Bill’s voice,
Ben came to life within me. This catalyst acted as a reflex to my senses, similar to the
 technique of sense memory.

My body movement requirements, as Ben, reminded me of images of Frank with
his hands or thumbs in his pockets, whirling around to face someone else while slouching
and spinning on the heels of his boots. Muscle memory of both images and actual prior
personal experiences were very vivid while I lived as Ben. Also, Buffalo Bill said a line
to me every night that triggered the modest and kind-hearted end of Ben: “Yes, little
lady. I’m delighted Miss Oakley” (Berlin and Fields 30). Because these images and
memories were so vivid and recent for me, the actor, I couldn’t help but allow them to enhance my characteristics of Ben.

The special thing about playing Ben, was that his demeanor and personality most closely fit mine out of the three roles I played. I was perfectly comfortable ‘living’ in Ben’s circumstances. His lines were respectful, modest, and friendly, and his demeanor was simple, kind, and unprofound. At times, this factor made playing Ben very easy. And at times, living in Ben felt so natural that I had to work to make sure I was listening and living in the moment, without checking out of the scene. During the performances, with tight transitions, I had to focus more for two crucial reasons. First, I came straight out of a large Kate-scene and secondly, because I was dressed and acting as a man in front of an audience, many of whom, I knew. Also, although I’ve played many male roles before, I’ve never played a male role with a love interest. This was a new challenge for me to approach.

After my first two lines: “Hello, ladies.” and “Ben Shipwright. Gonna play Vershinin.” as long as I focused on listening to Casey and Lisabette introduce themselves, focused on listening to Holly’s body language, and lived in the thick of Ben’s reality, I was focused. The scene played itself and before I knew it, I was tipping my hat to the women and out I sauntered.

JACKEY

Jackey’s appearance is clean and creatively eclectic. He is a short and thin costume designer who has short-styled hair and a passion for fashion. Jackey uses lots of hips and fingers when he speaks and works. As he walks, he leads with his pelvis. He is
very passionate when he talks, as he makes good use of pitch to compliment the conviction of his words.

Building the Character: As an actor, I struggled the most with this role. Relating to Jackey was farthest from myself. Generally speaking, sometimes developing a character that is very different than myself is easier because the characteristics are far-removed. However, in this case, it proved to be the most challenging. Jackey is a one-scene character in act two. We didn’t work on him much in the beginning of our rehearsal process. The lines were tricky to digest and define, and my first impressions of the line-readings seemed very different from what my director had envisioned. With physical and vocal challenges and an unclear character image, Jackey became a continuous work-in-progress. I am thankful for the patience of my co-actors and director, as they helped to guide me and slowly observed my character’s evolution.

Jackey presented me with the challenge of, first of all, acting as a gay man. In most scenarios, it is understood that serious actors should not rely on the display of physical stereotypes for the development of their characters. I tried to steer away from the “stereotypical gay man” right away, without giving myself a place to start. After much work between actor and director, I discovered the understanding of the subtextual and textual meaning of my lines and the scene, as a whole.

My voice would shift from throat placement to nasal placement. Being a back-of-throat speaker, it was a huge challenge to speak forward and still be sincere delivering my lines, because their meaning felt so distant. Eventually my consistency improved. Being a wide-stance, straight-striding female, it was very difficult for me to give Jackey a believable and subtle feminine quality. I practiced different walking leads and tempos
with varying degrees of hip movement. When I locked into one walking style, it was difficult to keep it consistent. In an intense workshop rehearsal of this scene, my director asked me not to gesture at all. I was instructed to only step if needed, and to speak in a monotone pitch, attempting to drain my lines of pre-developed interpretation. The less I did, the more my director liked my work. She explained that by shedding gestures and pre-conceived vocal and physical qualities, actors are able to find their neutral and honest foundation.

In another rehearsal of this scene, my director asked me to simply sit on the floor and pin Holly’s dress hem for the entire scene. While frustrated, this helped me to focus on the real intent of the scene, to forget about the physical challenges, and to listen and honestly take-in what Holly was saying to me. For the first time, I was truly offended by Holly’s comments, because I listened and let her statements affect me, as they criticized my work. I learned to simplify, solidify, and then move forward.

One night, before rehearsal began, Ellery and I paraphrased our lines from the scene, making them real and meaningful to our characters. This helped me to hear the realness of Jackey’s lines. It also pointed out what I was doing. I was speaking with an “actor-voice.” If the lines were truly affecting me, then an actor-voice would not occur. A day later, I had a three-hour car ride and for the entire trip, I paraphrased the whole script of *Anton in Show Business*, writing and speaking all of my lines, so they were personally meaningful to me. For some lines, I paraphrased within the exact circumstances of the character in the particular scene. For other scenes, I paraphrased a parallel situation to the circumstances, making it specifically meaningful to me. I was
excited to find a technique that worked for me, as an actor. Later, I learned that Stella Adler promoted the acting technique of paraphrasing to help produce truthful acting.

My progressive growth into Jackey’s character even affected the evolution of my costume. I wore a different costume four nights in a row right up through opening night. When our performance week arrived, Jackey had developed a style and accent that suggested a French background, complete with a beret. I also wore pleated navy slacks, loafers, a pink and fitted, button-up, short-sleeve shirt, and a mint green sweater tied neatly around my shoulders. This definitely reminded me of an upscale, very urban and protected, small, French, gay man. My resulting character of Jackey, literally took a month to develop. As a team of actors and director, we finally settled on a character choice that allowed me, the actor, to feel natural listening, moving, speaking, and reacting on stage.
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"...there’s always some foundation goes orgasmic. Multicultural! Multicultural! Yes! Yes!! Multicultural!!"
"The real difference is, you’re fired."
"I wondered if you would like to drink red wine with me and make love?"

"With Holly? ... With Holly."
"We know what it is to be isolated, vulgarized, we know what it is to work!"

"It's pain is our pain. The pain of the women of San Antonio."
"Excuse me." "Your role is to kill people."

"You hope to give the impression that you are on the side of life, when actually you are merchants of death."
"All right, a slit - waist to floor - let a little leg out."

"Well, lil' darlin', you would look delicious."
"...and how the vulgarity of the rich was not to see the desperate need of the poor, and how the vulgarity of the poor was to be blind to beauty, and the vulgarity of the intellectual was to separate thought from action."
"I held that kiss too long." "I noticed."
The KISS: “Oh God.”
“Hate that belt.” “Beautiful. Goddamnit, you’re beautiful!”

“Screw the boots!”
"The Ben/Holly relationship is a crucial parallel to Masha and Vershinin in *The Three Sisters.*"

"Are you superstitious? ... It's dark in here but I can see the shine in your eyes."

"There's more light over here."
“So it’s a real downer to have to pull the funding.”

“I didn’t realize when I gave you the okay that there had been a policy change up top.”
"It's the same amount I give to public radio, which I actually use."

"...are my eyes red? I hate it when my eyes are red!"
"...our little theatre that has... struggled and... held on by its fingernails... believe me... for all these years."

"It's one hell of a time to be fired, I'll tell you that."
"It leaves you penniless by the side of the road. Screw Thespis! Run for your lives."
"I got a film!" "You are kidding?" "That is great!"
"You are a very sweet cowboy, but it makes you, don't you see, completely disposable."
"This is it. I will take no prisoners. You have to blow me off."
"Go back to your wife... I got a couple minutes, tell me to go screw myself."

Cast and Crew: Anton in Show Business.
E.N.D. - October, 2007
WORKS CITED


