

Színház- és Filmművészeti Egyetem Doktori Iskola

# **ACTING METHODS**

SZÍNÉSZNEVELÉS

AMERIKAI ÉS HAZAI GYAKORLATI

TAPASZTALATOK ALAPJÁN

Angol nyelvű tézisek

Kiss Eszter Ágnes DLA

Témavezetők: Jákfalvi Magdolna egyetemi tanár

Kárpáti Péter egyetemi tanár

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## **Introduction**

The aim of the research is to determine which possibilities and techniques are suitable for synthesizing the methods of European and American acting schools, based on my experience in teaching and acting in Hungary and the United States. The first elements of this question came to my mind when I was leading actor training for students at the University of Chicago in the United States between 2006 and 2010.

As an actor who had studied within the traditions of European theater schools, I soon concluded that although all overseas schools had been based on European traditions, they had evolved significantly differently from those traditions in their approach and methods. I was faced with different sets of values and tastes - not only in the theater culture but many other areas as well. At first sight it appeared as an obstacle too hard to overcome. I finally succeeded in developing a program which introduced overseas students to the very foundations of acting based on certain theatrical theories originated from the appreciated European culture.

The program was built and further developed on a previous course I had launched in 2001 to train professional folk dancers, members of the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble. The method was based on a concept I had learned from my masters at the College of Drama and Film (Gábor Zsámbéki, László Sály, Mladen Vasary). I also included the experience I had gained during the workshops of Jacques Lecoq, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba and Ivica Boban during my college years and later as a Soros scholar.

The aim of my research was to explore which paths had been experimented by the constantly renewable theater world for building the actors' set of tools, and how those methods could be adapted to different cultural surroundings.

## **Theses**

### **I. Is it possible to put together a basic methodology that provides a safe and useful set of mental and physical tools for each stage performer?**

The problem I have chosen as the topic of my research is a complex phenomenon in the field of acting and can keep a demanding actor's mind busy for the rest of their career/life. We, actors, work in different ways, with lots of directors and colleagues, in various styles. Each work is a new challenge to find out how to use the tools we have previously collected among the special circumstances and demands of a new production's rehearsal process.

The early stage of the rehearsal is accompanied by a certain mood filled with curiosity and excitement as the actor tries to find out whether it is enough to pick some tools from their already existing arsenal, or perhaps it is necessary to take on a completely new approach. Throughout my years as an actor, I have experienced the need to consciously examine and regularly update my acting tools. The ever-renewing demands and changing styles also encourage us as actors to look at art from different angles repeatedly, to give different answers to the questions we have previously encountered. However, there are parts of an actor's personal toolbox that the actor feels confident with in any circumstance. This "realm" is always able to provide the comfort, to make the actor feel safe - even in a production that requires a whole new approach. This secure background, which can be mobilized at any time, is a help in experimenting and trying out new things more boldly.

Against this background in the beginning of my current PhD research, I raised the question: how these foundations - that come from various sources for each and every actor - differ from each other and whether there is a solid, universally applicable actor foundation that we all can rely on.

## **II. Can my methodology - rooted in European heritage - be applied to the different traditions of American theater and acting education?**

During my training held for Hungarian dancers, I summed up my own knowledge of actor training techniques and put together, as best as I could, a curriculum to enhance the stage presence and the dancers' confidence. Later, working as an actor in the United States, I was faced with another form of the actor's foundations, which in many ways was different from mine. I realized that on another continent there were different acting principles. While working as an actor, I also came across other styles in acting that I somewhat needed to adapt to. However, working as a teacher in America, I was given the freedom to experiment with the concept of whether university students from other cultural backgrounds were receptive to the so-called European-style of acting, which had been the starting point for all the methods used in America.

Can we create well-executed, enjoyable and well-targeted exercises that will help students feel confident on stage, approach their roles more accurately, and make teamwork smoother and more consistent?

In the methodology, which I had created for my American students - with the aim mentioned above - I looked for answers to the question whether that method, called "European" due to its flexibility and openness, could work or not. Since I had to adjust to the needs and requirements embedded in American culture, I felt an urge to clearly identify and justify the goals I wanted to achieve, so I always built the exercises around a certain cognitive process.

As an actor I kept a work journal in which I intended to highlight how the fusion methodology I had created worked in practice, for example during a rehearsal. While working on a new show, I used the experience of my teaching work and my knowledge concerning the reasons that had led me to building my topic. That way I could recommend my actors some well-chosen practices that made the rehearsal process easier and more enjoyable, while helping us work as a well-functioning team.

### **III. Does my core methodology, revised and reworked according to my practical experience gained in an American context, work in a Hungarian context, and to what extent is it valuable there?**

In my view, in my methodology I managed to set a series of exercises that can be used in domestic actor training. This method combines a wide and diverse European tradition with the American schools' accuracy for understanding and with a basic need to explore the theoretical background of the exercises as thoroughly as possible, to illuminate the aims and benefits of each assignment. In my dissertation, I seek an answer to how might this fusion work (through the learning and teaching process and artistic work) between a traditional - but in many ways further developed - European heritage and the practices of the American theater schools (that used to have the same European roots but due to the different needs they have developed different approaches.)

In that stage of my research, I was given the opportunity to add further elements to my experience in applying my fusion methodology. During the SZFE admissions preparation program in 2018 I held a course for young Hungarians where I applied my method developed for American students.

I had formed my methodology in such a way that it could be flexibly adapted to time constraints and back in Hungary I divided the material into four sessions of varying duration. I enriched the topics discussed during the four sessions, not only with physical exercises but also with individual and team work around Hungarian poems, according to the requirements of the Hungarian circumstances. Using the results of this course, I tried to answer the questions in Thesis No. III.