

# Group Experiences English Theatre

BY JACK LIGGETT.

When one takes 15 reasonably responsible St. Andrews students, transports them into a culture foreign but not completely strange to them, gives them a month-long course in acting (which is not necessarily alien to them), and allows them a certain amount of free time to explore their new temporary culture, these students are bound to have a worthwhile and enlightening experience. This may on first reading seem to be a bit of you-know-what, but this writer, who was one of the fifteen, does feel that on the whole our group experienced a very valuable and entertaining month.

Under the expert guidance of Mr. Arthur McDonald, and his self-appointed assistant tour guide (yours truly), we traveled to London for the January semester and there worked on what was officially titled "An Introduction to Acting". The group studied in an experimental theatre workshop called "Stage Two" and worked mainly with six artists: Mr. James Roose-Evans, a well-known English director and the organizer of Stage Two; Yoma Sasburgh, a fascinating woman who gave us lesson on movement; and the four current actors-in-residence of Stage Two—Hywel Jones, Kevin Costello, Diane Trevis, and Paul Sanders; all of whom we grew very close to. Work-outs were daily, five days a week, and consisted firstly of one hour's movement exercise with Miss Sasburgh. The exercises were very strenuous and exhausting but, at the same time, very necessary for what we were doing. Many of us were even so exhausted at the end of the day that we were really too tired to party and ruin St. Andrews reputation. Next was an approximately two hour acting session with Mr. Roose-Evans and the rest of the troupe. Everyone, "teacher" and student alike, was on an equal standing and participation was up to the individual; those who wanted to sit out could. Mainly we performed a series of improvisations based solely on a prop, or an idea, or even just another person. The purpose, as this student sees it anyway, was to get us to concentrate and to know ourselves and at the same time to understand others and learn to work with them. These are frontiers which should be crossed in order for an actor to be successful. And then afterwards we would briefly discuss the day's work over coffee and cookies.

In addition to those lectures given by Jimmy (as Mr. Roose-Evans wished us to call him), we heard four other British artists on various aspects of theatre. Miss Litz Pisk, who has

done choreography for the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre Company (the two main acting companies in England) and among other things was Vanessa Redgrave's choreographer for "The Loves of Isadora", gave a short but concise lecture on the history of dance and made a comment on our civilization of today when she pointed out that the dance of a period reflects the mood of the times and whereas dance started out as a rite and a working together for a common end, it has now evolved into a self-centered action where people dance apart and into themselves, not relating to the others around them.

Then we had discussion with three playwrights: Frank Marcus ("The Killing of Sister George", now mainly a critic), Tom Stoppard ("Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead", which we all saw done by the National Theatre Company), and Alan Bennett ("Beyond the Fringe"—a satirical political revue, and "Forty Years On"). The discussions not only enlightened us about playwrighting, but it was a relief for us to hear from all of them that it is not necessarily Broadway and the West End (London's answer to Broadway) which will keep the Theatre alive; it is experimental theatres such as the one we were working with and the "off-off-Broadway" productions which are doing this because, like any art form, drama needs experimentation and there is too much money tied up in a Broadway production these days to allow it to experiment and risk failing and losing hundreds of thousands of dollars. At least this made yours truly feel alot better.

But we did not only stay in London the whole time. In addition to seeing all the productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre Company and some of those of other theatres and also visiting the historical sites of London, we travelled around England and visited such places as the song-renowned Winchester Cathedral, Salisbury Cathedral, and Canterbury Cathedral where we attended a service. Also we went to Dover Castle overlooking the famous White Cliffs and to Stonehenge, the infamous old Druid ruins, which was one of the more fascinating parts of the trip for many of us. And of course no visit to England would be complete for an actor, or anyone else for that matter, if he didn't go to Stratford-Upon-Avon, the birthplace and residence of a playwright named William Shakespeare and the home, strangely enough, of the Royal Shakespeare

## Physical Exercise For Their Art

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cation that defies definition but invites involvement. Then they approach the frontier. Poles, ladders, boxes, bones, nets and combinations of things provide the physical setting for the actors as they move in silence toward the frontier. What frontier? The frontier that each of the actors defines by the movements that they evolve. Some relate. Some move in isolation. A segment of the relationships build to a seeming climax only to be stopped by Hywel Jones, one of the actor-teachers, who suggests that they begin the exercise again.

First they choose partners and sit on the floor. They look at each other. They stare for one minute, two minutes, three, four, five. Then again they move toward the frontier. One actor

shrouds himself in a blanket. Another grabs the feet of the shrouded figure. Another begins to build a pattern with the poles. Kevin Costello, an actor-instructor, begins to beat a drum. The improvisation continues. The actors proceed to discover not only a basic meaning of movement for the stage but they also discover a basic meaning of selfhood for the actor as his person is transformed into an instrument of artistic communication.

Then two hours later there is the first break. There is coffee, tea and biscuits. There is informal conversation as the actors reflect on the class, on the failures and successes, and on themselves. An understanding of esthetics become not a luxury for the isolated classroom, but a necessary point of conversation so that the experiences can be interpreted. Some are silent as they probe the experience. Some talk of the

weather and the train ride the past weekend to Canterbury. Some speak of the performance last night of the Royal Shakespeare Company. But all in their individual manner realize that they are becoming involved in their art form to a degree that is frightening, frustrating, perplexing and at the same time satisfying.

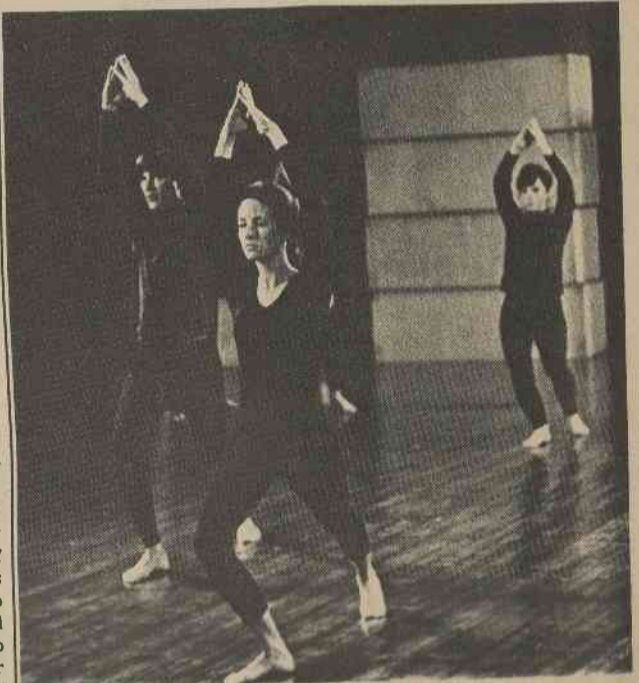
Farewells are spoken for the day and the student actors move down Regent's Park Road toward the tube station. Other move to the sign near the Roundhouse and board the double decker bus and observe the gray air as they move toward the hotel of Russeil Square. The mats and the props in the rehearsal hall are rearranged and the Stage Two actors continue their own work in the experimental field of improvisational theatre.

The day ends and there will be another day and another venture in the task and meaning of the artist.

Company. We saw all the Shakespearean relics and what was left of his wife's (Anne Hathaway's) cottage, which was being restored after being burned. It seems that a couple of months ago a young man got mad at his girl friend and so in the romantic spirit of the moment went out and set fire to the Hathaway cottage. This may sound funny, but the English are very proud of the Shakespearean heritage and while we were in England the young arsonist was sentenced to five years in a hard-labor prison for it.

Also the group had a free four-day weekend during which we scattered everywhere: some staying in London and England, others going up to Scotland and St. Andrews, and a few going off to France and Holland.

We were all gaining much experience on the trip not only about theatre but about alot of things. But soon the month was over, and we had to leave to come back to dear old SA. And even though a few in the group were anxious to get back to their waiting loved ones, most or all of us regretted very much leaving England and especially Stage Two where we wish we could have worked longer.



DAVID DOLGE, Jane Cline and Dawn Taylor go through their pace at James Roose-Evans Stage Two in London. They were among the 15 St. Andrews students who studied at the theatre for the January winter term.

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