

An Interview With William Jaeger

By HENRY J. PANKEY

(This portion will deal with questions directed to Dr. Jaeger.)

Question: If you had your way, to set up a four-year training program - what would be your plans for the first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth?

Dr. Jaeger: Well, if I had my way to set up a four-year training program, for the first year I would follow the school's policy on first-year students, even more strictly. That is, I wouldn't have the student doing any performing before an audience. I would have him, first, getting in touch with himself -- doing awareness exercises, yoga, improvisations - learning the principles of action, objective, focus, concentration, and the beginning of character work, without calling it "character work". I would make sure that his body, movements, mind and imagination were deeply trained - to free him - so that he could deal with the "new theatre". This could be done with sound and "movement" exercises.

The second year I would begin with easy text work - not the kind of text work that many schools do now by having the students go right into realistic scripts by Ibsen, or Strindberg and read it. I would make it a "process system", continuing from the first year, via sound and movement exercises, via physical exercises, then into the rhythms of the speech, and then the speech out loud, supplemented by the movement. So, when they begin realistic scenes by then, which could become closer to them, in the second year - they will be reinforced. Of course, this would include having a syllabus from different teachers which would be fused together.

I think the School of Arts must have one course which "proceeds" from the others, certain skills are gotten out of the way before you move on the Step II. I think, unfortunately, our students do not proceed at "even" stages. You see a sophomore, or junior sometimes, who does not know all that he should know about the techniques he should have gathered as a freshman. Much of this depends on which teacher they had, or which sequence. So, I think, the "performer" which means "forming through", the actor must learn to uncover, unveil himself - and to do this he must be very free. First, he must know himself, then he must know and work with others. So, I think we need a movement program, on campus that works together in a different scheduling than we have here.

The actor here, works too hard all day long, not getting ENOUGH in discipline, so what we have is a lack of discipline.

Because what he does is go from one academic class, with an hour or two in-between, another academic, to maybe a speech class, so finally at the end of the day he ends up in his acting class. So he comes to the acting class exhausted - if he has a scene class he has no time to prepare for the scene the next day. Or if there is homework to be done on movement or breath exercises, he has no time - particularly if he

is a sophomore, or junior and is in a play. He has no time - his nights are tied up with the play, he's in class from nine to five, and subsequently the play is made more important than the classroom work. The CLASS should be stressed as more important than the play.

Then we should have a sequence of classes where you go through realistic material your sophomore year, certain styles and material towards the end of the sophomore year, and your junior year beginning with Shakespeare, Moliere, and by the time the student has finished his third year - having had something like Judo, or movement, game, sports, Karate, then he would go through using his voice, and body instruments, performing the entire year - and that would make a much better school, which would produce a much better artist.

Question: What would you say, are the types of plays we should be doing now?

Dr. Jaeger: During the first year the student should become closer to plays that are already close to him - for example, he should know the American Drama, which isn't that extensive. And then the British - because it is the same language.

Then he should begin relating to drama of other cultures, by the end of the second year he should be moving into easier to do modes, not that it's any easier to do Ibsen, for example, but certain "kinds" of Ibsen... "Peer Gynt" maybe not, before "A Doll's House", or "Ghosts"... this should be done so that he is kept familiar with some often great playwrights. Then the student should move on into Strindberg, then Shaw, then up through our own Eugene O'Neil. He should

by now, be ready to study other styles, periods - all of this supplemented by the English Department. Classic periods, Greek drama, Shakespeare, the drama of the Renaissance, French drama, the Restoration, and the second and third year should really go into depth with the plays of the periods. Complimentary courses, for example in architecture, the art and philosophies, ideas of the period, should be studied as well.

Question: How can the academic department possible help?

Dr. Jaeger: Well, I think there should be more of a "course curriculum". Freshman students should come in as "ensembles". That is the freshmen should be divided into groups of 10, or 15, what I mean is learning how to play for repertoire theatre. I mean they would take all, if possible, of their classes together. And hopefully the academics will supplement the arts courses. While a student is studying realistic drama, they should also be studying the history of the culture, ideas, philosophy, the philosophies of Ibsen's Scandinavia, he should be studying about Russia, when studying

Chekhov - the music, as well. They should study the art, costumes, going through all of this with perhaps 10 or 15 other people. The ensemble-type set-up would continue through the second, and third years, and hopefully by the fourth year the 10 or 15 that has survived will emerge as the acting ensemble of the School.

Question: With the Van Peebles' staff for instance, they are asked to see all of the movies that come out. Many times when one asks a teacher about a certain, popular film, they haven't ever seen it. How do you think this problem could be resolved?

Dr. Jaeger: I think that the School should definitely keep a store house of films, at hand. As part of the educational program, when students hit the third and fourth year, and are studying Shakespeare, they should be able to see Olivia's "Richard III", have it on campus, or rented. They should be able to see his "Henry V" - even, in contrast the American version of "Midsummer Night's Dream"; I consider it silly, though. But we should have all of those great films so that he could (the student) have a model to study, right before him. So that he can see his Hamlet, good or bad. The school should have a selection of at least 50 films. Even Russian, when needed with duped voices or print underneath.

Question: It seems that often, just when a student has developed a comfortable feeling, in an ensemble type set-up, he is suddenly changed to another group of people to work with, or a new instructor with new ideas. What do you have to say about these sudden changes?

Dr. JAEGER: I agree that this is not good. It would be wise for the freshman or sophomore year, for the student to remain under the same instructor, so that the instructor can begin to learn him. Because it takes 20 or 30 weeks for him to learn your habits and problems. By the second year, if you can keep your ensemble group for another 10 to 20 weeks, the instructor can "begin" to work on correcting your mannerisms or faults. I think there is too much "accidental", or casual switching around here. Four weeks is really not long enough for a student to decide whether or not to drop a course, although I believe he should have that right. It takes a long time to really know a person, and people on this campus don't seem to realize this.

Question: What kind of movement classes do you suggest for drama students?

Dr. Jaeger: I have very strong opinions that "movement" for actors, should not be so much dance, but primarily movement that comes out of "mask" work, yoga - body movements coming from karate, judo - because I feel that the actor must be able to move himself facially, or lower body, into almost any possible positions to stimulate response. To do this he must be so aware, or consistently focusing, not only on his lower body, but attuned to his impulses, attuned to every muscle in his body - even his lip muscles. I think that the student here is not aware of many of the mistakes he's making, his mannerisms, because he is really not aware of his own body. And we have students who are juniors and seniors who have all sorts of body problems that we have not even begun to work on. So they are not free for moving on stage.

