

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Preface</b> .....	3
<b>Chapter One</b>	
<b>The Development of the Stanislavsky System, 1906-1990</b> .....	7
<i>The Initial Stage of the Development of the System</i> .....	8
<i>The Beginning of the Method of Physical Actions</i> .....	10
<i>Stanislavsky's Latest Discovery</i> .....	13
<i>The New Method Is Introduced into Theatre Practice</i> .....	15
<i>The Political Campaign Against the New Method</i> .....	17
<i>Post-Stanislavsky Development of the New Method</i> .....	19
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
<b>Stage Action</b> .....	23
<i>Example 1: The Old Uncle</i> .....	24
<i>The Characters' Conflict and Stage Actions</i> .....	25
<i>Example 2: The Colonel</i> .....	26
<i>Example 3: The Interview</i> .....	28
<i>Example 4: The Girlfriends</i> .....	29
<i>Example 5: The Jewels</i> .....	31
<i>The Focal Point of a Conflict</i> .....	32
<i>Communion on the Stage</i> .....	33
<i>The Actor's Adjustments</i> .....	33
<i>Action and Activity</i> .....	34
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
<b>Elements of Acting Technique</b> .....	37
<i>Energy</i> .....	38
<i>Example: A Shocking Accident by Graham Greene</i> .....	41
<i>Energy Exercises</i> .....	44
<i>The Object</i> .....	48
<i>Emotional Memory</i> .....	50
<i>Entering the Stage</i> .....	51
<i>The Actor's Attention On-stage</i> .....	52

**Chapter Four**

<b>Structuring the Play</b> .....	53
<i>Subdividing a Play into Events</i> .....	53
<i>Event One</i> .....	54
<i>Event Two</i> .....	58
<i>Event Three</i> .....	59
<i>Event Four</i> .....	60
<i>Event Five</i> .....	62
<i>On the Character's Position in a Conflict</i> .....	63
<i>Possible Types of Conflicts in an Event</i> .....	64
<i>The Concept of the Superobjective</i> .....	64

**Chapter Five**

<b>Work on a Monolog</b> .....	67
<i>Monolog of Natalya Petrovna from A Month in the Country</i> ....	69
<i>Monolog of the King from Hamlet, Prince of Denmark</i> .....	71
<i>Monolog of Podkolesin from The Marriage</i> .....	73

**Chapter Six**

<b>The Actor's Training</b> .....	77
<i>Training in the Workshop Environment</i> .....	80
<i>Refining an Improvisation to the Point of a Finished Scene</i> .....	87
<i>Individual Exercises at Home</i> .....	89

**Epilogue**

<b>The Actor's Transformation</b> .....	93
---	----

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	95
------------------------------	----

<b>Notes</b> .....	97
--------------------	----

<b>Bibliography</b> .....	101
---------------------------	-----

<b>Index</b> .....	103
--------------------	-----

<b>About the Authors</b> .....	105
--------------------------------	-----

# Introduction

The name Stanislavsky is known to millions of theatre-lovers across the globe. Yet few in the English-speaking world have an accurate understanding of what he actually taught in the last few years of his life when he pulled all his ideas together. This is not due to any lack of interest or want of serious study but to the circumstances in which his ideas traveled to the West.

It is a complex problem, but two main causes are evident. First, most actors, directors and students are dependent on translations which originally were heavily edited and cut and which have never been revised despite the wealth of material that has become available in the last half-century. They are, in the opinion of experts and scholars, not merely inadequate but, at times, misleading. However, no alternatives are available. Second, Stanislavsky never wrote down his final formulation of the “system” and the Method of Physical Action. He was in his seventies and extremely ill. Time was running out and in a final effort to pass on his ideas, Stanislavsky gathered round him a small group of students, handpicked assistants and colleagues from the Moscow Art Theatre, and created the Opera-Dramatic Studio at which, in the last three years of his life from 1936 to 1938, he put them through an intensive course of training in acting technique, play-analysis and rehearsal method. He thereby created a living tradition which has been handed down, generation by generation, from master to student, notably at the Moscow Art Theatre Studio Theatre School and the State Institutes of Theatre Art in Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) until the present time. Igor and Irina Levin are among the inheritors of that tradition.

The great virtue of the “system” is its openness. That, indeed, is why Stanislavsky increasingly put the word in quotes. Basic principles aside, the “system” can and must be developed. In the years after the Second World War, when the Method of Physical Action had finally been accepted, many leading Soviet directors adapted the “system” to fit changing needs and changing

circumstances, thus guaranteeing its creative power and preventing it from declining into a sterile set of rules, something which Stanislavsky feared and fought against all his life. The “system” had to live and grow. It was a way of creating living art, not a theoretical straitjacket.

Stanislavsky was also clear that the “system” had to be adapted to the needs of different cultures and traditions. It must not be mechanically transplanted across national boundaries. During the Moscow Art Theatre tour to the United States in 1923 and 1924, he realized how different American attitudes were from Russian. He developed a great admiration for the American people, their openness, their energy and their curiosity. The “system,” he came increasingly to understand, could not be formulated and applied in the same way in New York as in Moscow. When he met the young Joshua Logan in the late 1920s, he told him firmly, “Don’t copy me. Find your own answers.”

Igor and Irina Levin summarize half a century of developments of the “system” in terms that are accessible to American artists and scholars. By concentrating on certain fundamental ideas, they cut through the many confusions that have arisen and present the Method of Physical Action in all its clarity, simplicity and logic. This they do, not through abstract theory, but through a series of contrasting, concrete examples, enabling the reader to see basic principles in action.

In addition, they remove any illusion that the Stanislavsky “system” can be identified with the Method as taught by Lee Strasberg at the Actors’ Studio — an error, which, to be fair, Strasberg himself never committed. Here we are concerned with action, communication, interaction and conflict, not with a search for emotion which often has more to do with the actor himself than with the character he is playing.

This book may, and should, surprise many by its challenge to accepted notions, but its conclusions should be taken seriously.

*Jean Benedetti*  
*Stanislavky scholar and biographer,*  
*author of Stanislavski and the Actor*