

***Voice into Acting: Integrating Voice and the Stanislavski Approach.* By Christina Gutekunst and John Gillett. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014. Paper \$29.95. 408 pages.**

How should an actor make a character's words her or his own? Should she focus on a play's language and form or the imaginary circumstances and organically created meanings? Earnestly engendered and detailed in presentation, Christina Gutekunst and John Gillett's *Voice into Acting: Integrating Voice and the Stanislavsky Approach* seeks to mend the "natural gap between the actor and a character's words" by presenting an integrated program of voice and acting training (11). Deeply considered and firmly structured, and with an abundance of organizational guides, reminders, introductions, and codas, the four-part work makes a worthwhile contribution to the timeless debate between form and feeling. It belongs in the hands of any theatre artist seeking concise informative summaries on various vocal and acting concerns, or considering alternative techniques to help develop a harmonized creative process.

Part one focuses on the differences between representational and organic acting and their relation to the actor's voice. In so doing, it elucidates a list of reasons actors may feel disconnected from their text and investigates the anatomical and physiological components of the neural processes involved in creative work and skills training. The latter is an especially lucid and informative summary. It demonstrates the authors' openness to groundbreaking research in neuroscience and articulates the body/mind connection in a direct, uncomplicated way.

Part two examines six selected voice fundamentals: alignment, breath, centred onset of sound, pitch range, resonance, and articulation. A full chapter is devoted to each and includes basic descriptions and exercises "to clarify how things work, to offer training advice, and to integrate acting process" (30). The chapters on alignment and breath are especially noteworthy. Complicated anatomical features and movements are well illustrated and described in a precise and efficient way. Instructors could be greatly aided by assigning the reading before or after classroom experiential work. Throughout the book, the topics of discussion are rendered in a student-friendly tone, and teachers will appreciate the motivational "What It Means for the Actor" sections that accompany each fundamental and encourage students to contemplate how the work will help them in performance. Each chapter also includes a section on integrating the material with acting. Practical application of newfound skills can be very helpful in the classroom, and the exercises rightly maintain their focus on the voice while allowing students to touch onto the basic acting values of truthful connection and intention.

Part three focuses on the integration of voice with the authors' "organic acting process" (169). Directly based on the theory and practice of Konstantin

Stanislavski, the approach explores several key aspects for development: receiving and responding; awareness, ease, and focus; dynamics of action; seeing, sensing, and feeling; character voice; and the actor in the space. Students looking for a summary of basic acting techniques with practical applications to scene work will appreciate the cogently presented lessons, along with the many inspiring quotes from Stanislavski and famous modern theatre artists. As the flip side of part two, acting is the focus here, but sections on uniting acting and the voice are offered throughout and contain numerous exercises that encourage breath and physical release, as well as connecting the voice to words and meaning. The instructions have a comforting feeling; by reinforcing the voice lessons from part two, it's like having your own private vocal coach aid you with simple reminders during an acting lesson or offering you more developed guidance after class. One inviting approach circulates around vocal image work—exploring the connotation of words in order “to vibrate your experience through the resonance of the vowels” (223). The concluding chapters on character voice and working in the space are chock-full of useful exercises from an inventory of well-known methodologies; vocal coaches especially may keep these pages close at hand.

The fourth and last part explores the integration of acting and voice in rehearsal. Using a scene from Shakespeare's *Othello*, readers are guided through the authors' entire process so as to ready themselves for performance. Particularly replete with hints for success are the chapters on script analysis and scene breakdown. Attention is brought to questions and research, superobjectives and prior circumstances, the first reading, and beats of action. Supportive and helpful in tone, the authors invite rather than instruct, offering ways to consider the play and find one's personal way into the text. Thought boxes are added to suggest ways of thinking about the voice before and during rehearsals, with many suggested exercises connecting text to a supported voice. The final chapter seeks to unite the different topics with lessons on rhythm, intonation, and poetry.

While helpful in many ways, *Voice Into Acting* may leave some voice teachers disappointed with the finer points of exploration. Most of the exercises, which are eclectically culled from various voice and actor techniques, can seem to emphasize the technical points at the expense of organic creation. Centred onset to sound, for instance, is a topic presented as a place “that expresses ‘me’ within the voice,” but is coupled with exercises on optimum pitch, a very technical concept (111). They go together physiologically, but the inquiry to unite them in sensory experience and self-discovery is missing. This tendency to focus on the technical or intellectual understanding drains the work of a deeper, organic inspiration, advancing voice training solely in service of the “intention” and “will” of acting and omitting opportunities of somatic release and sound experience in relation to personal exploration, growth, or, as Alexander Lowen beckoned, pleasure. Overall however, *Voice into Acting* is presented with a direct and compelling progression that students,

professionals and teachers alike may well find refreshing and capable of stimulating considerable contemplation on the synergy of two vital techniques of their craft.

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