A Study of Three Montreal Children's Theatres

ABSTRACT

This study examines three major Montreal Children's Theatres: The Montreal Children's Theatre directed by Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters, which followed the British tradition, the studio operated by Madame Jean-Louis Audet which had its roots in the French tradition, and the Children's Drama Group of the Jewish Public Library, organized and directed by Mrs. Dora Wasserman, a graduate of the Yiddish Art Theatre in Moscow.

The Montreal Children's Theatre, during its forty years of existence, has presented over five hundred stage productions to approximately a quarter of a million children. It emphasizes theatre craft as a means to personal development.

Dora Wasserman initiates Stanislavski techniques in modified form to promote emotional expression and imagination, which she considers essential attributes both for theatre and for social living. She attempts to stimulate in children a love of the Yiddish language and culture, and an appreciation of theatre as an art form.

Madame Audet, phonetician, stressed voice and speech skills which she maintained released the child's latent personality. Language, she believed, was the key to cultural identity; she advocated phonetic instruction to all classes of children in order to preserve the French-Canadian heritage. Because she taught phonetics through the theatre medium, an impressive number of leading French-Canadian actors evolved out of her training program.

Contrary to recurring charges by Developmental Drama theorists that Children's Theatre directors pressure children into professional theatre careers, the study discovers that the three Montreal companies are more concerned with the child's personal development than in producing actors.

A STUDY OF THREE MONTREAL CHILDREN'S THEATRES

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To those former students of Madame Audet, including her son, Jean-Marc, and her sister Madame J. J. Penverne, who interrupted their busy schedules to supply me with very valuable information.

To my mentor, Dr. John Ripley, for his infinite patience, advice, and guidance.

To my husband, Maurice, for his constructive comments during the writing of this thesis.

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But what is left after the director and actor?
Only memories.

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INTRODUCTION

The original purpose of this study was to trace the history of Children's Theatre in Montreal in the twentieth century, to examine its philosophy, and to assess its contributions and possible future directions. In the process of research, seventeen Children's Theatre companies were uncovered, many of which were transitional. It became evident that an in-depth study of a few would be more profitable than a superficial analysis of many.

Three Montreal Children's Theatres in the twentieth century have had long-standing influence; through drama classes and theatre presentations they have exposed several thousands of children to the theatre experience. The Montreal Children's Theatre (1933 to the present), directed by Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters, which followed the British tradition, the Children's Drama Group of the Jewish Public Library (1953 to the present), organized and directed by Mrs. Dora Wasserman, a graduate of the Yiddish Art Theatre in Moscow, and the studio operated by Madame Jean-Louis Audet (1933 to 1969), which had its roots in the French tradition, have been selected for this study. The companies offer a cross-section of approaches to pedagogy and theatre philosophy.

The study will examine the formative influences on the leaders, and their philosophies and methodologies. Some attempt will also be made to assess their pedagogical, artistic, and cultural contributions. These three traditions offer diversified views. Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters, influenced by the British tradition of commercial theatre, have emphasized the acquisition of acting skills, which they believe release the personality of the child and foster self-expression. Although training for the professional stage has not been a primary goal of the Children's Theatre, many of their pupils have entered the profession as actors, drama teachers, film directors, or in other areas of theatre. For these reasons, the writer believes that the Montreal Children's Theatre has been a strong influence and a guiding force in the education of children to the world of theatre, and in the building of an English-speaking audience in this city.

Dora Wasserman, who received her theatrical training in Russia, where she also acted in Yiddish theatre, attempts to stimulate in children a love of the Yiddish language and culture and an appreciation of theatre as an art form. In her workshop, she combines Stanislavski techniques[1] with keen perception which results

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[1] Mrs. Wasserman studied the Stanislavski method at the Yiddish Art Theatre under Madame Alexandra Azarch, wife of Granowski, organizer of the school.

in a drama method close to that known as "creative" or "developmental". Unlike Developmental Drama practitioners, she exposes her students to production as well as improvisational exercises. She strongly believes that a combination of the two is essential for children, whether the aim is personality development or theatre training.

Madame Audet, Quebecoise, was educated in an international French environment, and worked tirelessly all her life to maintain the spirit, heritage, and cultural identity of the French-Canadian people. She was convinced that language was the key to personal expression; she taught phonetics through the theatre medium and many outstanding French-Canadian actors evolved out of her training program. She provided students with a solid foundation of vocal skills which developed self-confidence and contributed to their all-round growth.

This study makes no claim to be definitive. Madame Audet is deceased; newspapers printed little about her, and her company's presentations were apparently never reviewed. One was forced, therefore, to seek out her former pupils. Their memories, in certain instances, were not precise, and some dates may be open to question. Her philosophy was interpreted through their comments, and later verified through the examination of her book, Les Monologues du Petit-Monde. Her unpublished manuscript, Manuel de Français Oral Phonétique et Diction, was also consulted. Although her son, Jean-Marc Audet, furnished some facts about her early life, he did not know or had forgotten many details.

Dorothy Davis, Violet Walters, and Dora Wasserman, although living and accessible for interviews, presented as many problems. Although all have taught for many years, none has recorded philosophies or methods. One was forced, therefore, to rely on the interview method. It was difficult to draw out their philosophies and to distinguish clearly between methods to which they pay lip service, and methods which they practise.

In the case of Dora Wasserman, whose first language is not English, and therefore is restricted at times in terms of vocabulary, an attempt was frequently made to articulate for her through the philosophies of Stanislavski and Boleslavsky with whose work she is familiar. Often thoughts were phrased for her, and the writer asked whether she agreed.

A different problem existed with Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters. These two articulate ladies have a sound methodology and speak fluently; however, in discussions they have a tendency to digress. The interviews were further complicated by the fact that the writer was a former pupil and taught at the school for several years. Although every attempt was made to be objective, first-hand knowledge of their system coupled with strong personal attachments, made unbiased judgements extremely difficult. Documentation, conspicuously lacking for the other companies, was more than plentiful.

Reviews of over five hundred theatre productions presented by the Montreal Children's Theatre were carefully studied, but all were extremely favourable in content. One must allow for a certain degree of "puffing" on the part of Children's Theatre critics who do not wish to criticize child actors.

Until recently, Children's Theatre[2] was the most common form

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[2] Children's Theatre - that form of theatre in which scripted plays are presented for children by children, the primary goals being training of participants and entertainment of child audiences.

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of drama education in Canada, but in the past fifteen years it has fallen into disfavour with Developmental Drama[3] practitioners who

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[3] Developmental Drama - an activity in which groups of children under an adult leader, explore their resources through a wide range of drama exercises; scenes or plays are improvised, but the prime purpose is personality development rather than enlightenment of a child audience.

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have sharply criticized the older method. This study attempts to elucidate myths and misunderstandings regarding objectives. If it has not succeeded in this area, it may, at any rate, serve as a prepared document of some historical interest to future researchers.

DOROTHY DAVIS AND VIOLET WALTERS: A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE

Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters, the organizers and directors of the Montreal Children's Theatre, have devoted nearly forty years to this enterprise. With more than five hundred stage performances, their students have played to approximately a quarter of a million children.

They have been principally guided by British principles of theatre and theatre training. These theories included accentuation of physical and vocal aspects of characterization as opposed to psychological delving into roles. Similarly, "the actor's looks, his sex appeal, his personality"[1] were emphasized as essential

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[1] See John Gielgud, "Introduction", An Actor Prepares, Constantin Stanislavski, (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1959), p. xiv.

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attributes for the commercial theatre.

Miss Davis, born in London, England, in the late nineteenth century,[2] was involved in this British commercial theatrical scene

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[2] Miss Davis' date of birth is unobtainable.

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from early childhood. She was initially trained as a toddler by her mother who studied drama at the Academy of Dramatic Arts, and her

cousin, Julia James, who played leads in Drury Lane pantomime. As a young child, she attended Westminster Drama School where children were taught elocution and drama through the recitation of poems. At the same time, she played in the London music halls.

Upon coming to Montreal in 1919, she acted with The Community Players (forerunners of the Montreal Repertory Theatre).[3] From 1919 to 1921, she played in dramatic shows on CFCF radio, a medium for which she was most qualified as a result of her British elocution and voice-production training.

[3] The M.R.T. was the only repertory company in Montreal for many years.

Although Violet Walters emigrated to Montreal in 1918, it was not until 1924 that the two ladies met. Miss Walters, born in Colombo, Ceylon,[4] spent her early years in Edinburgh. At St. Gabriel's Academy in Montreal from 1918 to 1922, she received her first drama training. She subsequently studied acting privately with Harcourt Farmer, a well known Montreal drama teacher and actor, and in 1922 played Ophelia to his Hamlet in a production directed by Rupert Caplan.[5]

[4] Date of birth is unobtainable.

[5] Rupert Caplan, Drama Producer at CBC, was also well known as a Montreal theatre director.

She also trained as a dancer from 1926 to 1930 with Montreal dance teachers George Shefler and Maurice Morenoff. In 1927, she joined a road company which toured the U.S.A. She returned to Montreal in 1928 and danced professionally at the Palace, Capital, and Imperial Theatres.

While working as a dancer, she studied drama privately with Miss Waddley at McGill University. Here she received a thorough grounding in the Elsie Fogerty method of speech training,[6] and

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6 See Elsie Fogerty, The Speaking of English Verse, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923).

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later incorporated this approach in her classes.

From 1924 to 1933, Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters pursued theatrical careers, intermittently appearing in the same productions. Conscious of community needs and deficiencies in the area of theatre and theatre for children, the two ladies laid plans for a Children's Theatre. With films banned to youngsters under sixteen,[7] they

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7 As a result of the 1925 infamous movie house fire on St. Catherine Street, East, in which ninety-eight children were killed, a law was passed prohibiting children under sixteen from seeing movies.

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sensed a need for children to have some form of entertainment.

> .... their objective was to provide a cultural background for children, and to create in them a love of the theatre, and an appreciation of good plays ... play acting must be an enjoyable experience both for those who perform and those who watch them; that the plays ... must be good fun, good philosophy, and good history, or a combination of all three, in order to provide a youthful audience with a constructive experience to carry with them out of the theatre. [8]

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[8] S. Morgan Powell, "Seventeen Years Record One of Constructive Achievement", The Montreal Star, September 30, 1950, p. 25.

The studio was eventually opened in Miss Davis' residence [9]

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[9] Miss Davis was married to Louis Stein, and had one child, Robert.

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on Girouard Avenue in 1933. The twenty-five by forty foot basement was arranged as a stage replica with curtained dividers representing entrances and exits. [10] The first play, The Cave of the Island King,

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[10] This location and design remain unchanged.

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by Miriam Stein, took place in 1934 at Victoria Hall, which is still the site of productions.

In addition to their children's productions and classes, Miss Davis and Miss Walters continued active professional careers. They joined the John Attenborough Company in 1934, and played in the

old melodrama productions staged next to Her Majesty's Theatre in the Corona Barn.[11] It is possible that this affinity for melodrama

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[11] The Corona Barn was destroyed by fire in 1937. They revived the company in 1950, and presented "The Drunkard" and "No Mother to Guide Her" in the Astor Café on St. Catherine Street, West, for three and a half years. During the summer of 1949, they presented plays at Ste. Adele Lodge, in Ste. Adele, Quebec. Cynthia Jones, "Dorothy Davis, Violet Walters Mark 25th Year With Children's Theatre", The Westmount Examiner, November 8, 1957, p. 4.

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reflects itself in Children's Theatre productions; as a rule they exhibit frank expression of emotion and a preponderance of physical action.

Repertoire has principally consisted of fairy tales and classical children's stories. Because the directors have observed that "children want fantasy when they go to the theatre", roughly two-thirds of their stage and radio productions have been fairy tales; many of these scripts have been adapted specifically for their group of young thespians. It is interesting to note that even though the present generation of children is more factually and scientifically knowledgeable than its counterparts of a generation ago, the desire for fantasy has not altered; in fact, the fairy tales produced at Victoria Hall always play to full houses, while classical or modern plays are less well-attended. Through its fairy-tale dramatizations, the Children's Theatre attempts to

supplement the child's factual world with magic and fantasy to activate his senses, stimulate his imagination, and arouse his creative spirit.

In order to successfully initiate this process, Miss Davis and Miss Walters have made every attempt to captivate their young audiences through spectacular stage effects. The following review gives the reader an image of the type of atomosphere often created by Children's Theatre shows.

> Those who witnessed the production of Hansel and Gretel at Victoria Hall, Saturday, spent an afternoon among the pages of Anderson's immortal fairy tales. Hansel and Gretel was more than a play - it was a panorama of beauty steeped in the essence of Fairyland. Magic and mystery formed the pattern of this colourful fantasy, the script an original version of the old story, was written by Jean Low .....[12]

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12 Jean Low, a Montreal writer, adapted many plays for this group, both for stage and radio.
"Children's Theatre Play is Tremendous Success", The Westmount Examiner, May 2, 1947, p. 9.

Furthermore, the directors of the Children's Theatre have continually striven to provide young people with creative, authentic staging in all their productions. Realistic, aesthetic scenery and costumes, they affirm, are crucial factors in establishing and sustaining audience absorption in the production. This attempt to create authentic background suitable to the play's action is

confirmed by the following critique of a Canadian première staged by the group.

> ..."The Indian Captive", an exciting three-act play, telling the story of the little white girl Eleanor Lyttel who was captured by the Indians, is historically correct, and in order to have everything absolutely authentic as to the beautiful Indian customs and rituals, the Children's Theatre have been fortunate in securing the guidance of Chief Poking Fire, of Caughnawaga, who has been attending rehearsals and assisting the directors. The Chief himself will appear in the interesting and unusual adoption ceremonial, and he will adopt the little white girl into the Indian tribe...
>
> Beautiful Indian costumes are being shipped from out of town, special scenery is being built, and there are delightful Indian dances and Indian songs. Over 50 of your favourite Children's Theatre young players will appear.
>
> At the end of the performance Chief Poking Fire will again appear on the stage and present prizes of Indian drums which are being used in the play... [13]

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[13] "Children's Theatre Play to Feature Indian Chief", The Westmount Examiner, March 4, 1949, p. 13.

The reaction of the children at the performance was described in this manner.

> Hundreds of children sat tense with excitement to see "The Indian Captive" on Saturday afternoon at Victoria Hall and loved every minute of it to the fall of the curtain...[14]

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[14] "Indian Captive Ends Its Run on Saturday", The Westmount Examiner, March 18, 1949, p. 17.

Authenticity of setting and spectacular effects were only complements, however, to swift-moving action. This activity projected itself to the child spectator, generally evoking an audible, physical reaction, as observed by the following reviewer.

> ... the cheers and shouts of the youngsters to the excitement at the capture of the big bad wolf was ample proof that the directors of the Children's Theatre ...know just what kind of theatrical fare pleases their many patrons...[15]

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15 "Red Riding To Be Repeated", The Westmount Examiner, November 11, 1949, p. 13.

Because speech training was such an important part of their program, it is not surprising that the Montreal Children's Theatre directors chose at the outset to involve their students in radio work. As early as 1935, they began to direct radio productions;[16]

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16 "Children's Theatre Staging Radio Hour", The Westmount Examiner, November 1, 1935, p. 3.

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then in September, 1936, the school inaugurated a radio course, and a series of one-act fairy-tale dramatizations, adapted by Miriam Stein, were broadcast on Station CFCF.[17]

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17 "Children's Theatre Resumes Work Early", The Westmount Examiner, September 11, 1936, p. 3.

The series continued until 1945, at which time, "Calling All Children", a new radio series, was implemented. The adaptations of well-known stories were written by Jean Low, and presented Saturday mornings from 10:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. on CFCF. [18]

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18 "Children's Theatre Starts Radio Series", The Westmount Examiner, October 26, 1945, p. 8.

With the advent of the new series, the directors, in keeping with their aim of voice training, hired a specialist in the field of radio to instruct their pupils in radio acting.

> ... Charles Miller, popular and well known radio personality whose voice is heard daily over CBC has joined the ranks of the teaching staff, conducting many of the radio courses, as well as some of the boys' dramatic classes...
>
> Mr. Miller's radio course will include diction, voice culture, dramatizations, and microphone technique, and will prove valuable not only to those who wish to cultivate talent in order to go into the professional field, but also those who wish to improve speech with good pronunciation and clear enunciation...
>
> Pupils who qualify in Mr. Miller's classes will be given an opportunity to appear on "Calling All Children", the popular feature of the Children's Theatre, heard every Saturday morning over CFCF. [19]

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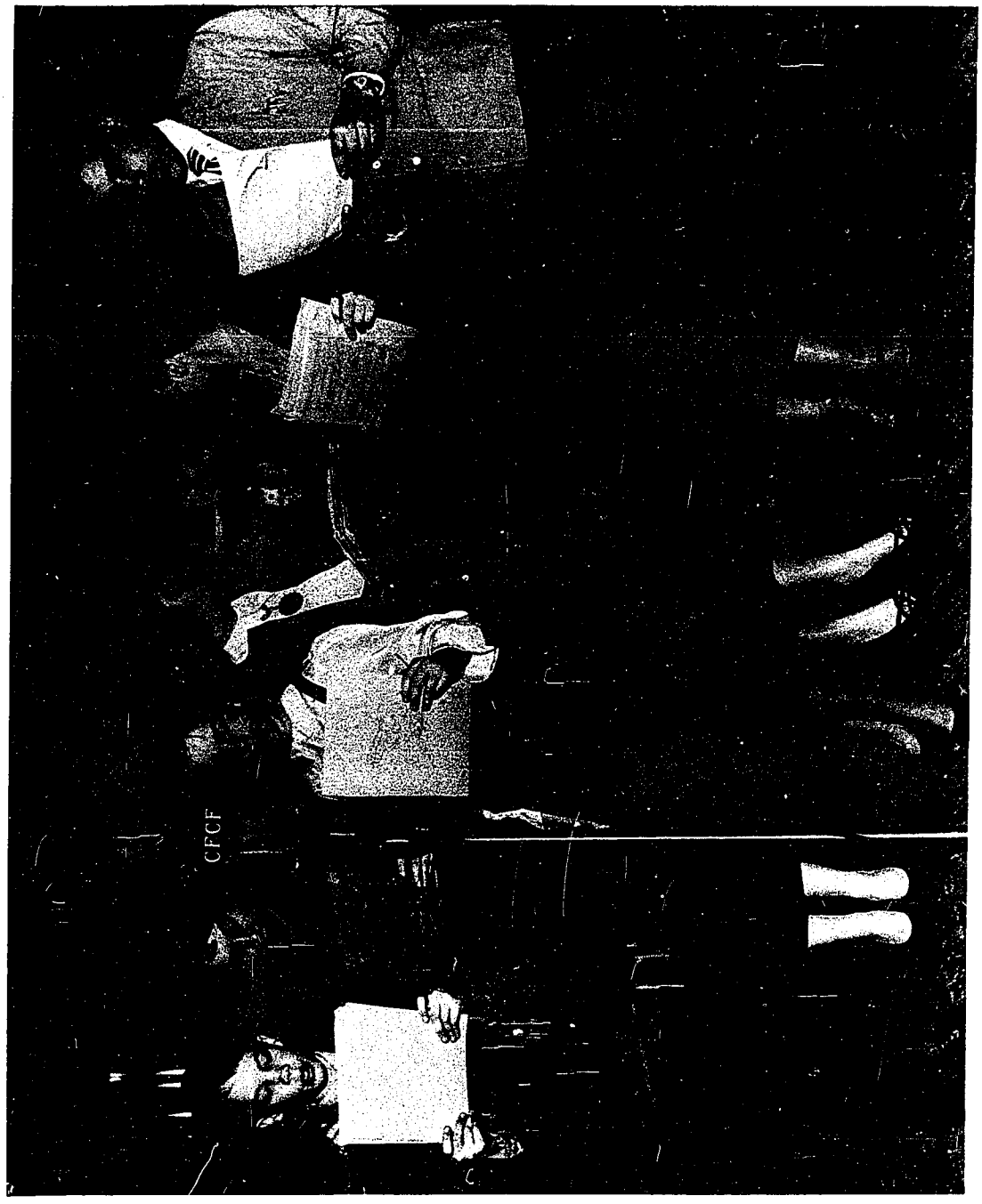
19 "Charles Miller Teaches Class Radio Courses", The Westmount Examiner, October 11, 1946, p. 4.

P L A T E I



Calling All Children, radio program, directed by the Montreal Children's Theatre, 1950.

In order to stimulate youngsters to develop their acting potential, the Children's Theatre staged a talent contest on radio in February, 1947. The competition was open to Montreal children who were not already registered at the school.

> There was great excitement at Station CFCF this week when the thirteen final contestants in the big contest sponsored by the Children's Theatre, directed by Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters, took their final auditions...
>
> The greatest number of points went to Sandra McLellan and Dick Easton, which means that these two youngsters will get the opportunity of receiving a radio course at the Children's Theatre...[20]

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20 "Winners of Children's Theatre Contest Named", The Westmount Examiner, February 28, 1947, p. 14.

Finally, Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters were the recipients of much coveted honor when the Beaver Award for the best program of the year went to CFCF in May, 1955, for Calling All Children .

> CFCF RADIO has been chosen for the Canadian Beaver Award, the "Oscar" of Radio and TV broadcasting.
>
> The award was presented for CFCF's "Montreal Children's Theatre" produced over CFCF by the well known drama team of Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters for the past fifteen years.
>
> During this period of time, CFCF's "Montreal Children's Theatre" afforded early opportunities for dramatic self-expression to such famous Canadian artists as Dick Easton, Bonar Stuart, Patricia Joudry...
>
> Awards were based on the decisions of an independent board of judges, representing the fields of Research, Education, Entertainment, and Publishing in Canada... 21

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21 "Children's Theatre Program Wins Radio Award for CFCF", The Westmount Examiner, May 13, 1955, p. 13.

In addition, the directors have, over the years, attempted to keep abreast of Children's Theatre activities in other countries. As the Canadian delegates to the Children's Theatre Convention in New York in September, 1949, they participated in the evaluation of developments and techniques in various phases of children's theatre work, including acting, broadcasting and television.[22] Their

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22 "Dorothy Davis - Violet Walters Return From C.T. Convention", The Westmount Examiner, September 9, 1949, p. 5.

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international involvement has frequently been responsible for their choice of scripts not previously presented in Canada. Moreover, it has allowed them to build contacts for those students interested in pursuing theatrical careers.

> ...Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters spent some time in New York with Clare Tree Major of Children's Theatre fame, and arrangements have been made that talented pupils of the Children's Theatre who have completed their training here, can be auditioned at the National Academy of Dramatic Art by Mrs. Major...23

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23 Ibid., p.5.

Also, it may have provided the initial impetus to implement television classes for junior and senior students when that medium became popular in Canada.

> With the field of TV opening up, and the demand for TV actors and actresses becoming greater, the directors of the Children's Theatre have been fortunate in securing the services of Roger Racine, well known CBC TV producer who has some 700 successful TV shows to his credit. Mr. Racine will now be associated with Children's Theatre, giving a course in training in TV work. This will be open for seniors and juniors, but is intended for only the serious-minded students and auditions will be given prior to acceptance. 24

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24 "Children's Theatre Announces Plans for Coming Season", The Westmount Examiner, September 2, 1960, p. 17.

Although the directors of the Montreal Children's Theatre have afforded their students training in the various media of stage, radio, and television, they regret their inability to offer in-depth training in stagecraft. A spacious school incorporating such features as lighting equipment and a costume department, has been the directors' dream for many years. Unfortunately, they consider the renting of such space impossible without government assistance. However, when the occasional child exhibits a keen desire to learn a specific skill, they make an attempt to accommodate his interest.

This concern for students' welfare extends to all the youngsters in their school; at present, the school is comprised of

one hundred and fifty students.[25] Its six studios are located in

[25] It has fluctuated over the years between this number and three hundred.

various suburbs of the city. Staff, including the directors, number eight.

The Children's Theatre is a business operation owned by Dorothy Davis and Violet Walters, and is supported by students' fees. Although shows play to approximately four thousand children per year, the revenues barely cover expenses. Nevertheless, the directors retain the individual character of their school by affording students the opportunity of stage experience.

Actually, the school's individuality is maintained in two aspects of its structure. First, it unites a training school with theatre production, which, according to a recent study,[26] is an

[26] See Jeanne Claire McRae "A Study of Children's Theatre", (unpublished Master's thesis, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1950), p. 39.

unusual combination. Second, investigations reveal that it is the only private organization in Canada presenting major stage productions by children for children. This aspect of the program has been implemented both for the benefit of the actors, as well as for the enjoyment of the child audience. The directors have noted that child spectators enjoy watching child performers, and that

adults often look ludicrous in children's roles.[27] In addition,

[27] See Caroline E. Fisher and Hazel G. Robertson, Children and the Theatre (California: Standord University Press, 1955), 3rd ed., p. 22.

there is a danger that adult actors may exhibit too many subtleties of characterization which are lost on the young viewer.[28]

[28] Ibid., p. 55.

PHILOSOPHY

> The stage director, especially in the children's theatre, is above all a total human being, a complex combination of heredity plus environment; and specialized training in directing is but a part of this environment...Nor can we say which is the more important: a love and understanding of children, or a love and understanding of theatre. 29

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29 Geraldine Brain Siks and Hazel Brain Dunnington, Children's Theatre and Creative Dramatics (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1967), p. 111.

The above description of the ideal stage director could well be applied to either Miss Davis or Miss Walters. Their raison d'être is, and always has been,"our love for our students and the belief that our students reciprocate that love, and never forget us". In fact, the school is based on the personalities of the directors; their warmth reaches to each and every child, and their interest in their students' welfare transcends the teacher-student relationship. Deeply concerned about each individual, they are regularly available for consultations with both children and parents. Regrettably, because of this personal interest, it is most unlikely that the Children's Theatre will be continued when its founders are no longer physically able to operate it.

Their total commitment to teach students theatre skills forms the basis of the Children's Theatre curriculum. At this

point, one might inquire, "Why give children theatre training? What are the advantages to the average child?"

By providing children with a solid foundation of technique, the directors believe that they are equipping students for theatrical careers and for the various life situations which may confront them now and in later years. Because Miss Davis and Miss Walters were influenced by the British tradition of commercial theatre which emphasized vocal and physical skills, they view these skills as fundamental aspects of theatre training. At the same time, they feel that voice and body control are crucial to personality development.

Miss Davis and Miss Walters seem to view the voice and the body as two separate entities, and little attempt is made to inter-relate them. Unlike contemporary speech teachers who believe that "complete involvement of the body helps to give shape and direction to the speech muscles",[30] the Children's Theatre

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30 Christabel Burniston, Speech for Life, (London: Pergamon Press Ltd., 1966), p. 43.

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directors do not recognize the relationship between speech and mental and physical energy.

Vocal study encompasses articulation and pronunciation by means of exercises and recitation. Physical carriage is drilled

through postural exercises, and movement is practised by miming short scenes. This concentrated initial emphasis on external technique relegates creative drama to a later stage in the student's program. At that time, when technique has been assimilated, and the student is master of his physical self, the directors assert that he will have the verbal equipment to facilitate language flow, and the physical control to execute movement; these qualities release inhibitions, allow the imagination to soar, and enable the student to create "on the spot".

The directors maintain that mastery of technique, in addition to furthering improvisation, advance character creation in a scripted play. The power of good speech, vocal control, and well-defined movement, provides the student with a positive mental attitude with which to create a role. This mental attitude extends itself to the child's everyday environment thus affording him with the self-confidence and courage to confront personal problems and manage new situations.

Similarly, in the relationship between physical control and mental outlook, physical actions influence inner development. This truth applies to both theatre and personal development. The directors note that once external technique has been established, the inner life of the part automatically develops. That is to say, that physical actions give birth to internal actions. Truthful

playing, therefore, cannot be accomplished without physical control. Similarly, personality cannot flourish before the individual has conquered his physical self.

In a like manner, the Children's Theatre directors stress external technique as the key which opens the door to spontaneity. This notion is diametrically opposed to contemporary theory which suggests that natural acting can only be achieved if handled in two stages, leading from inner development to outer technique.[31]

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31 See Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theatre (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 285.

Because of this emphasis upon external technique, little attempt is made to develop students' emotional and intuitive qualities. Unlike Development Drama practitioners who stress discovery of inner personal resources as the prime requisite to personality development,[32] the directors of the Montreal Children's

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32 See Brian Way, Development Through Drama (London: Longmans Green and Co., Ltd, 1969), p. 12.

Theatre regard a well-modulated voice and graceful body movement as paramount requirements for a successful life.

Also important, though, are those social skills acquired through group participation in theatre productions. Individual

responsibility, commitment to the group, and personal and emotional control are fostered by stage experience. The child who does not possess sufficient talent to pursue a theatrical career can benefit from his work at the Children's Theatre in terms of personal and social training. He acquires a professional attitude toward theatre involving total commitment to a project. This commitment will extend itself to other areas of society and business in which he may find himself later. Such qualities as punctuality, co-operation, tolerance of one's fellow worker, physical endurance, and the ability to function under pressure combine to develop the individual's personal control and strengthen his social relationships.

Those children who have been observed by the directors and adjudged to have innate talent, are similarly nurtured by the acting experience. In fact, the directors do not attempt to build stars by capitalizing on the talent of individual children; on the contrary, they constantly guide students according to individual ability and potential.

> If there is talent in a child, we water it, make it grow. If there is not, the student is learning how to speak well. He may forget this over the years if he does not wish to retain it, but at least he has been made aware of good pronunciation, good articulation, and expression. If one has a monotonous voice, no one will listen to him. The voice is used in every aspect of life; if a person has a pleasing voice, it is so much more pleasant to talk with him.

The above passage by Miss Walters underlines her deep concern for "speech for life". Because a "pleasing voice" accelerates communication by immediately arresting the attention of the listener, and thereby gaining his interest, she and Miss Davis counsel their students to enunciate well at all times, so that good speech will become habitual. In this attitude toward constant use of correct speech, they are in line with the best theory of their time.[33]

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33 See J. G. Marash, Effective Speaking (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1947), p. 26.

In order to alleviate the problem of ridicule which students may encounter if their speech is different from those in the community in which they live, the directors do not teach children to over-enunciate. This particular attitude toward speech training is advocated by leading speech experts.[34]

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34 See Audrey M. Bullard, Speech at Work, (New York: Longman's, Green and Co. Ltd., 1951), p. 8.

In retrospect, the Davis-Walters philosophy might be summed up in the equation "Speech plus Poise equal Personality".

> Speech is the hall-mark of culture and character. Poise is attained by overcoming self-consciousness. Personality is developed by acquiring poise and good speech. 35

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35 "Sixth Season is Commenced", The Westmount Examiner, September 16, 1938, p. 6.

METHODOLOGY

In line with their policy of providing students with individual attention, the Children's Theatre directors organize small classes; each group contains a maximum number of ten children.

Studio work includes exercises to advance "pure vocal tone, vowel standard, clear articulation, intelligent phrasing and emphasis".[36] The one-hour classes often commence with speech scales

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[36] Fogerty, op. cit., p. 165.

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or exercises designed to increase voice range and inflection, and improve modulation and projection. These "scales of the speaking voice" are essential practice to achieve a "fluent and naturally expressive voice".[37]

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[37] Harry Johnson, Practical Speech Training (London: Herbert Jenkins Ltd., 1958), p. 59.

Because lazy muscles often cause indistinct speech, exercises in lip flexibility, essential for proper placement of vowels, are introduced. Lip and tongue agility are also promoted through tongue twisters, the mastery of which necessitates rapidity and clarity of speech which, the directors affirm, lead to precise pronunciation. In addition, tongue twisters "tone up the lips and encourage you to centralize sounds and send the tone forward".[38]

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[38] C. Burniston, op. cit., p. 35.

In keeping with the philosophy of leading speech experts of a generation ago,[39] the Children's Theatre directors advocate

[39] See J. G. Marash, op. cit., p. 18.

purely formed vowel sounds as the first essential of correct speech. Students practise exercises in making the short and long vowel sounds.

Clearly articulated consonants - the second essential - are also stressed by the directors, again often in the form of tongue twisters.

> Consonants are important because upon them speech depends
> a) for its distinctiveness
> b) for its brilliance or verve
> c) for its firmness [40]

[40] Ibid., p. 18.

Breath control, essential for proper theatre projection and good vocal tone, is introduced to older students; this respiratory training involves increase and control of the air supply. Specific literary passages are utilized for this purpose of "sustaining".[41]

[41] The passage beginning "Pale Melancholy sat retired..." from Collins' "Ode To the Passions", is the one most frequently used in Children's Theatre classes. See Fogerty, op. cit., p. 246.

Unlike certain speech experts who are violently opposed to visual control of speech,[42] Miss Walters believes that clear speech

[42] See George Draper, Commonsense Speech Training (London: Newnes Educational Publishing Co., 1951), p. 11.

is attained by a combination of proper tongue placement and ear training. She therefore periodically uses a mirror to help students produce certain sounds e.g. the ng sound in the word "king".

In addition to vocal exercises, speech instruction is given through recitation of poems, monologues, and excerpts from scripts.[43]

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[43] This method of teaching speech through recitation was employed by Westminster Drama School in London, where Dorothy Davis received her early training.

Many of these selections are presented at studio "closings" which are held at the end of each season.

Because the teaching of voice and body skills are essentially disassociated from one another in Children's Theatre classes, flexible and controlled body movement is instilled through postural exercises, arm and wrist movements, mime, and curtsies. The latter skill is considered to be important background for the child who may later appear in a period play. Similarly, students are made aware of the value of good posture, both for stage work and everyday life. They are encouraged to sit straight, stand and walk correctly. Various postural exercises are initiated to induce proper body alignment.

Impromptu mime scenes which allow movement practice are acted by students, both individually and in groups; these scenes are unaccompanied by music. Attention is paid to precise gesture, general expressiveness, body carriage and movement.

The younger students are encouraged to enact short scenes with improvised dialogue. Subjects with which they are familiar in their everyday life are introduced. There is no discussion following these spoken improvisations; they do not appear to be goal-oriented either toward production of skills, or toward the broadening of social awareness. While this informal drama appears to allow students a range of imaginative experience, conversations with Miss Davis and Miss Walters did not reveal any deep-seated pedagogical reason for improvisational activities. Unlike Developmental Drama educators who employ improvisations as a means to developing and enriching the inner life of the child, the Children's Theatre directors utilize this form of drama more as a recreational activity than a method of teaching skills indirectly.

As was mentioned earlier, speech and body skills are taught as directly and straight-forwardly as possible. For instance, pronunciation and posture are corrected during rehearsal periods, as well as in classes. Qualities of clarity, projection, intelligibility, and pleasantness are constantly stressed in Saturday and Sunday afternoon rehearsals which run five to six weeks prior to production. Stage technique, including deportment, stage positioning, and movement motivation are coached at this time.

Dance, another valuable asset in developing physical control, is often included in productions; this activity allows more

children to participate. In this area, Violet Walters' dance background has been an important attribute; in fact, she choreographed the Children's Theatre shows for many years, tirelessly drilling students in sequences of steps. Her graceful body carriage, a possible product of her dance training, has inspired students to move easily and expressively.[44] The value of

[44] For the past ten years, Agy Polly, former soloist and choreographer of various State Operas and films in Eastern Europe, choreographed productions.

dance in theatre production is further underlined by Fisher and Robertson:

> Dancing is an invaluable aid in all play production. Some productions call for choruses. Not infrequently they may have appropriate dances interpolated into them. Dances give many children a chance to participate, and break the monotony of the dialogue and action. They bring lightness and color into the play, aiding the participants by increasing their muscular control, grace, and rhythmic sense. Beyond this they stir the imagination and enhance aesthetic appreciation.[45]

[45] Fisher and Robertson, op. cit., p. 68.

Because the directors are of the opinion that stage experience enhances personal development, each of the three annual productions rotates three casts of leading characters, once again offering more

young people an opportunity to participate. The two hour shows, performed on Saturday afternoons for three consecutive weeks, involve large numbers of children; often between sixty and one hundred appear in a given production. Those children who show minimal talent are not discriminated against, but receive equal chance to play principal roles once they have attended the school for a given length of time (generally three years).[46]

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[46] First year students do not usually play in major shows except in group scenes.

Besides permitting additional children to play in productions, the rotation of roles system is designed to teach good sportmanship. The child who had a lead in the first show may play a minor part in the second. This method is generally employed in professional repertory companies; it (a) offers varied experience to actors and (b) it counteracts cultivation of "stars". The directors are aware of the possible danger that may beset the child who constantly plays title roles; he may develop a magnified self-image, which will adversely affect his personal and social relationships.

Although all Children's Theatre students receive equal opportunities to play in major shows, eventually playing leading roles, from time to time they are requested to audition for parts in professional companies. The directors prepare them to be good sports if they do not get the part. They are told, "If you are

P L A T E II

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, presented by the Montreal Children's Theatre, December, 1968.

chosen, you are lucky; if you are not chosen, you say, maybe next time".

Good sportsmanship is but one of several social skills developed through production experience. Because the directors treat everyone in the cast alike, qualities such as co-operation, group commitment, and sharing emerge. The rehearsal and production situation thus prepares children for improved social living.

Although social training is a primary goal of the Children's Theatre directors, many of their students have pursued theatrical careers. The male professional actors who play in the shows[47],

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47 Generally two or three adult actors appear in major productions.

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were for the most part, trained by Children's Theatre as youngsters. The children in the cast benefit educationally and psychologically by playing with professionals; they gain technical knowledge through observation, and are inspired by the realization that former Children's Theatre students are now professionals in the field.

> George Carron, a former pupil of Children's Theatre, recently returned from the Royal Academy in London, England, is back as guest, to play the title role of "Robin Hood"...[48]

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48 "Children's Theatre 'Robin Hood' ", The Westmount Examiner, April 19, 1957, p. 2.

Similar benefits are derived from the crew which surrounds Children's Theatre productions. The lighting designer, his assistants, the stage manager, and his assistant are professionals. This emphasis on professional staging is in line with the directors' philosophy that realistic decor acts as a stimulus to the emotions of both actors and audience. Similarly, costumes, which the directors profess aid characterization, and sustain mood, are rented from a well-known Montreal costume shop.

In line with this effort to maintain the audience's attention, a master of ceremonies entertains the children during intermission with participation jokes, stretching exercises, awarding of door prizes, etc.; this entr' acte serves to counteract boredom or rowdiness.

The directors personally supervise every aspect of productions, including ticket sales, advertising, house management and make-up.

In spite of their extreme care in preparing and planning productions, persistent problems exist in both rehearsal and performance areas. Because rehearsals must meet a production deadline, the directors must drill the cast so that a polished performance can be accomplished. Public attendance of shows and critiques in the newspaper demand efficient acting and production. As a result, rehearsals are not as creative as one might hope;

the casting, blocking, drilling method is adopted for all shows, partly because of pressure of time, and partly because this British professional orientation toward theatre is part of the background and training of the directors.

An additional production problem exists in the structure of the theatre itself. Victoria Hall is a poor choice for children's plays because the five hundred and seventy-five seats are not elevated; this factor results in poor sight lines especially for those children who have been seated directly behind adults, as well as for those who have been placed near the back of the house. Poor sight lines and distance from the stage reduce involvement with the playing area and diminish concentration.

In the area of spontaneity, one might assume that difficulties in maintaining the innate naturalness of children would present themselves within a structure that emphasizes stage technique to such an extensive degree. Mastery of skills, being a long-term process, might only be achieved after a certain number of years of study. In the interim, these students are performing for the public; therefore it is possible that technique at this stage has not been sufficiently absorbed to produce spontaneous acting. On the other hand, there are those in the theatrical field who argue that acting is seldom inspired or intuitive in any case; it is in contrast, carefully planned, or skilfully concealed artifice.

One fact seems obvious: the Montreal Children's Theatre attracts and fulfils a need for those children who wish to perform. Their theatre productions serve as motivating factors for children who would otherwise not be attracted to drama. It is quite apparent that the experience afforded children at this school is enjoyable and worthwhile when one considers (a) the number of students who continue at the school for extended periods of time, as illustrated by the following quotation

> It is interesting to note that the father and stepmother will be portrayed by David Luck and Phyllis Gibson. These two young thespians have been with the Children's Theatre for several years, and five years ago, they played the roles of Hansel and Gretel. [49]

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[49] " 'Hansel and Gretel' Final Children's Theatre Show", The Westmount Examiner, April 25, 1952, p. 12.

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and (b) the large registration of children of former pupils.[50]

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[50] "Montreal Children's Theatre Marks Thirtieth Anniversary", Pat Ippolito, The Westmount Examiner, October 5, 1962, p. 13.

In effect, the Montreal Children's Theatre offers youngsters a training program combined with stage experience; the main emphases are placed on vocal control and stage deportment. The mastery of these two resources, coupled with theatre performance,

are viewed as the most valuable self-confidence building ingredients which ultimately lead to personality development. The directors maintain that once external skills have been acquired, inner resources independently develop and materialize. The above qualities, both internal and external, are recognized by the directors as prime equipment not only for active theatre participation, but for coping with ordinary life situations as well.

Through inculcating in their students a professional attitude toward rehearsal and production the Children's Theatre directors instill character building qualities in their youngsters; such characteristics as group responsibility, improved social behavior, co-operation, punctuality, and good sportsmanship emerge under their conscientious, benevolent guidance.

By and large, however, speech training seems to dominate the Children's Theatre curriculum. Articulation, as Coquelin states, should be "the first study of the actor. The public must understand every word he says..." [51] One comes away from a Children's

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[51] "The Dual Personality of the Actor", Benoit Constant Coquelin, Actors on Acting, Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949), p. 199.

Theatre production with the distinct feeling that Coquelin's words have been thoroughly digested by every child on the stage.

DORA WASSERMAN: A STANISLAVSKI WORKSHOP FOR CHILDREN

Mrs. Dora Wasserman is recognized as teacher, director and vital theatrical force in the Montreal Jewish community. She is founder-director of both the Children's Drama Group of the Jewish Public Library and the Yiddish Theatre for adults. Her phenomenal energy and exuberant personality project to those around her, kindling in both children and adults a sense of joy and love of theatre. In fact, it can be said that she employs drama and music to promote enjoyment and laughter.

Her expertise in theatre arts is the result of many years of theatrical training and acting background in Russia. Similarly, her strong belief that the Yiddish language and culture are powerful instruments to preserve the Jewish heritage can probably be related to the Nazi holocaust. Equally significant, her devotion to Yiddish theatre may be traced back to her active participation in this medium in Russia, where she was a victim of its demise during World War II. Her remarkably strong instinct for artistic survival has been a driving force throughout her difficult and frustrating life during the Stalinization process.

Born in Zhitomir, Russia, in 1921, Dora Wasserman's early childhood indicated promise as a singer; thus upon graduating

from High School, she spent one year at a Moscow music school. Dissatisfied with singing studies, she transferred to acting, auditioned for the Yiddish Art Theatre in Moscow, and was accepted.

Five years of rigorous training followed. The twelve hour daily curriculum included four hours of academic studies intended to provide the student with knowledge essential for his theatrical career. The remainder of the routine consisted of instruction in the various theatre disciplines such as acting, voice, and movement. A follower of the Stanislavski system gave classes in this method.

Immediately after graduation in 1941, Mrs. Wasserman was engaged to play in TUSE, a Yiddish Theatre for young audiences in Kiev, Ukraine.[1] In this company she learned to maintain a high

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[1] Although each town had a youth theatre, TUSE was the only Yiddish youth theatre in Russia.

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level of acting. She played Yiddish classics, Shakespeare and fairy tales in the eight hundred seat theatre which was constantly filled by groups of school children in the afternoon, and children accompanied by adults in the evenings.[2]

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[2] The youngsters were prepared before every play by the theatre's literary group, which travelled to the schools, outlined the plots, and discussed the themes with the students, many of whom did not speak Yiddish.

Two years later when the government closed the company as

part of its policy to remove Jewish culture, Mrs. Wasserman joined a new "kollectiv theatre" of young actors in Korestin. This company failed to materialize because of World War II, and in 1943 she found herself on the last freight out of the country. A subsequent series of wanderings in diverse theatrical and political environments during the War years influenced her profoundly; attitudes toward both theatre and Jewish culture were solidified in this period.

In the Caspian Sea area, to which Stalin had exiled outstanding intellectuals in the late 1930s, Mrs. Wasserman adapted to a new language and a primitive way of life. The republic of Kazakh became her home for the next five years; here she acted with untrained, talented Kazakh actors, and played to undisciplined, uninhibited audiences, who frequently came on stage and mingled with the actors.

In 1945, she left Kazakh with her husband[3] and small daughter

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[3] Mrs. Wasserman met her Polish husband in the Kazakh theatre, where he was employed as lighting technician.

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destined for Breslow, Poland; she joined a newly-formed group of actors who presented folk dances, skits, and monologues for Jewish community organizations. These performances, often unremunerative, marked the beginning of Mrs. Wasserman's unselfish dedication to the Jewish community wherever she lived. Finally, anti-semitism drove her small family to Austria, where they remained for a year, while

Mrs. Wasserman entertained displaced persons in the various P camps.[4]

[4] The P camps were organized in Germany and Austria by the Americans for those people who wished to emigrate to North America.

The Wassermans with their two small children finally emigrated to Canada in 1950. Shortly after their arrival, Mrs. Wasserman discovered the Jewish Public Library,[5] where before long, she

[5] The Jewish Public Library is a branch of Allied Jewish Community Services, and is financed by Combined Jewish Appeal.

entertained a writer's group with several solo performances. Horrified to learn that Montreal Jewish children did not comprehend Yiddish, she began a twenty year program to build an audience for Yiddish theatre.

In 1951, she visited the Jewish People's Schools to observe standards of theatre presentation. Disappointed by the stilted, unimaginative productions directed by teachers with no theatre training, she sought opportunities to teach drama. The following year, the principal of Avrohom Reizen, a small afternoon school, permitted her to produce a play with his students on a voluntary basis. She selected Oscar Wilde's The Happy Prince, in the Yiddish text, and utilized simple sets and costumes; the production was so successful that the group presented two repeat performances. As a direct result of this achievement, Dora Wasserman opened drama

classes at the Jewish Public Library; these classes were initially patronized by the cast of The Happy Prince.

At the time, the Jewish Public Library, situated on Esplanade Avenue, provided a story hour; Mrs. Wasserman supplemented the Librarian's reading by improvising these stories with the children in her own classes. The Executive Director was so impressed with her work that he included a stage in the building plans for the future library. When the library moved to Decarie Boulevard in 1953, Mrs. Wasserman organized workshop classes in her enlarged space.

The first Saturday, forty-five immigrant children between the ages of ten and twelve assembled in the group; their first language was Yiddish.[6] Mrs. Wasserman commenced with an

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[6] These students, now in their twenties, form Dora Wasserman's adult group.

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improvisational approach in these drama classes, then led into a final presentation. This combination of informal drama and production is maintained in her present classes, of which she has child, teen-age, and adult groups.

Repertoire in these workshops consists of fables, fairy tales, and children's stories in which the students introduce their own ideas. Fairy tales are performed from scripts with children up to eight or ten years of age only; Mrs. Wasserman has noted a

marked increase in resistance to fairy tales within the past ten years. She attributes this phenomenon to the bombardment of factual information through the mass media which causes children to relinquish fantasy at an earlier age. She notices, however, that folk tales, such as Sholem Aleichem stories, are popular with the younger children while the fifteen and sixteen-year olds prefer more serious repertoire. Mrs. Wasserman employs texts by such writers as Oscar Wilde and Isaac Bashevis Singer.[7]

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[7] Stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer are adapted for her group by a Montreal writer.

This repertoire is employed in her many productions which take place not only at the Jewish Public Library, but at community agencies in various parts of the city. Devoted to the Jewish community, she transmits this commitment to her students by taking them to perform in hospitals and convalescent homes.

In addition to her work with young people, Mrs. Wasserman presents a full-scale musical production for adults every year. Her amateur cast is surrounded with professional crew, and specialists in music and dance.[8] She also receives a grant from the Jewish

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[8] Eli Rubenstein, Roumanian musician, now residing in Montreal, composes for these shows.

Community for this ambitious project.

On the whole, Dora Wasserman's small beginning has grown to the point where her theatrical efforts are now acknowledged by leading figures in the Montreal theatre scene. She is supported by the Jewish community and encouraged by notable theatrical personalities. This year, in recognition of twenty years of dedication to Yiddish theatre, Mrs. Wasserman received the Performing Arts Award, presented annually by the Jewish community. It was awarded by Secretary of State Gerard Pelletier in acknowledgement of her notable contributions to the performing arts.

> Dora Wasserman and her Yiddish Drama Group productions have possibly done more to revive interest in Yiddish and the Yiddish theatre, than almost any other single individual or group in Montreal. 9

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9 Charles Lazarus, "Jewish Schools to Present Arts Award", The Montreal Star, May 10, 1972, p. 35.

PHILOSOPHY

Dora Wasserman applies the resources of her rich cultural and theatrical background, combined with keen perception, in her drama workshop. She passes on to young people her theatrical expertise, her cultural knowledge, her awareness of human relations, and her devotion to theatre, culture, and humanity.

Her philosophy may be attributed to several influences: first, her education and theatre training at the Yiddish Art Theatre which gave her a regimented view of acting; next, her Stanislavski classes which stressed "psycho-technique" as a means to strengthening inner development; then, her involvement in TUSE Theatre for Children which influenced her theatre production standards; also her participation in Yiddish Theatre at its peak in Russia which inspired love for this vibrant element of Jewish life, and finally, her victimization and displacement when Yiddish culture was annihilated, which provoked an enduring persistence to revivify the Yiddish theatre.

These background influences constantly emerge when one examines Mrs. Wasserman's philosophy and goals. She describes her drama groups' main aims as follows: (a) to preserve the Yiddish language in Montreal, (b) to build an audience for Yiddish theatre, (c) to develop the imagination "on a wide scale" through (i) freeing the body, (ii) sense exercises, (iii) improvisational "études" or

exercises and (d) to develop the child's inner resources which will lead him to an understanding and love of theatre. In other words, Mrs. Wasserman's workshop emphasizes development of student potential through drama.

Given her disciplined theatre background in Russia, one might accordingly expect a drama school to centre on actor training. Instead one discovers a workshop which emphasizes personal development and group experience. Why this seeming paradox? As we have seen, Dora Wasserman equates actor training with thorough theatre education and total involvement in a full-time program. As a one-woman operation, she is unequipped to provide students with instruction in the various theatre disciplines. Rather than make a feeble attempt at "professionalism", Mrs. Wasserman has opted to devote her efforts to develop in children an appreciation of theatre, which she feels will lead them to personal growth and development as human beings.

A drama workshop, Mrs. Wasserman categorically states, must be conducted in an informal, relaxed atmosphere, totally unlike a classroom situation, in which all participate equally and share experiences with one another. Her approach has much in common with that of Viola Spolin:

> If the workshop maintains the game-like structure, the child joyously enters the experience and in trying to solve the problems of the activity will impose....

> necessary disciplines upon himself. For any child (if he chooses to play) will become involved and abide by the rules (group agreement) and accept the penalties and restrictions that are placed upon him. As he does so, more of his human potential will be released as his social sense and individual talents develop. [10]

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[10] Violin Spolin, op. cit., p. 288.

At the Jewish Public Library, Dora Wasserman's students are intensely involved and committed to the group; because they look forward to sessions, attendance is regular. Mrs. Wasserman credits the personal attention which she lavishes on her students as the main reason for their prolonged continuance in the program. She is not merely involved with them in the role of teacher-director; she also discusses personal problems with them sympathetically and privately.

Mrs. Wasserman believes that because the present generation of teen-agers socialize exclusively in couples, they are deprived of group relationships. To offset this deficiency, she organizes trips to plays and films with her students. These outings encourage a continuation of the group rapport established in the workshop. Similarly, they stimulate an appreciation of theatre.

Workshop classes are likewise intended to promote personal growth. Enormously influenced by Stanislavski's stress on the

"inner creative state", Mrs. Wasserman concentrates on providing her students with the type of atmosphere likely to induce meaningful inner personal experiences. She adheres to this method both in her improvisational work and in her productions. In fact, her combination of creative drama with theatre production places her in a school of thought with Davis and Larson.[11] Frequently, her improvisations lead to a given production.[12]

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[11] See Jed H. Davis and Mary Jane Larson, Children's Theatre, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1960), p. 18.

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[12] Some specialists in theatre direction maintain that workshop training should always be related to playing; that improvisations should be directed toward the solution of an acting problem in a particular play, and not be carried out in an "academic vacuum". See Robert Lewis, Method - or Madness?, (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1958, p. 81).

Classes focus on those emotional-discovery and communication skills considered requisites both for acting and for personality development: physical and mental relaxation, concentration, imagination, and social relations. Mrs. Wasserman adopts Stanislavski's notion that "everything must be real in the imaginary life of the actor". Her attitude toward acting embraces this principle, but her method of fostering it is modified for children. Concentration exercises are adjusted to the shorter attention spans

of the youngster, and Stanislavski's "psycho-technique" is applied in limited form. Self-development and sense awareness are promoted as those qualities essential for developing human potential as well as for training actors.

Unlike Creative Drama teachers who feel that young children should be restricted to improvisation and in effect be prohibited from production participation until High School, Mrs. Wasserman advocates stage experience at an early age when children are less aware of an audience.

Productions are further considered valuable in terms of group experience, encouraging in children a sense of responsibility toward one another. Through stage experience, children realize that a play cannot be performed successfully without the full co-operation of everyone involved in the production. She states, "Performance is the greatest experience a child can have...it develops security, independence, and concern for others". Mrs. Wasserman further believes that the experience of stepping into the shoes of another character, expressing his thoughts and actions, likewise fosters empathy and leads to deeper tolerance and understanding of one's fellow man.

In addition, participation in an imaginative situation translates emotion into action, thus providing the child with a natural opportunity to express his feelings. This emotional experience projects itself to the audience, providing an emotional

PLATE III

Bom Un Dradedl, by Oscar Wilde, presented by the Children's Drama Group of the Jewish Public Library, Spring, 1960.

interchange between spectator and participant. She credits this instinctive communion between player and audience for heightening spontaneity and deepening the playing experience. This intensified sensitivity to other people's responses creates the actor's "ecstatic moment" and produces joy in the individual. Mrs. Wasserman's emphasis on joy is similarly endorsed by leading educators:

> When joy is absent, the effectiveness of the learning process, falls and falls until the human being is operating hesitantly, grudgingly, feafully at only a tiny fraction of his potential. [13]

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13 George B. Leonard, Education and Ecstasy, (New York: Publishing Co. Ltd., 1968),p. 20.

At times, Mrs. Wasserman will expose a child to stage production before he is psychologically prepared. The knowledge that he will overcome his fears, in fact, the resulting pride and joy in achievement, she hopes, will compensate for his initial stage fright.

It has been mentioned that improvisations are intended to provide direct experiences. Similarly, roles in plays are developed from "within", rather than through external technique in the belief that the externals of the characterization will evolve once the "correct" inner state has been realized.

> ...the physical materialization of a character to be created emerges of its own accord once the right inner values have been established. 14

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14 Constantin Stanislavski, Building a Character, (New York: Theatre Arts Books: Robert M. MacGregor, 1964), 8th ed., p.3.

Although Dora Wasserman constantly stresses the value of theatre performance, she nevertheless considers it unnecessary to present highly polished public presentations. She is more concerned with intellectual, emotional, and social development of students, than with the finished product. Intellectual growth is stimulated through memory training and vocabulary enrichment, while emotional harmony is achieved through the imaginative experience and through social training. She therefore suggests that small, informal presentations for parents and friends are conducive to self-expression in that they provide a more inclusive, comprehensive communication between audience and participants.

METHODOLOGY

Dora Wasserman's workshop is designed to develop individual and personal faculties which evoke thought, sensitivity to experience, imagination, and "full" living. Classes attempt to provide significant and suggestive experiences to feed the imagination, and affect attitudes toward life and people.

Group interaction in the workshop promotes informality, teacher-student trust, group commitment and co-operation. When Mrs. Wasserman acts as confidante to students, she attempts to instil a positive, constructive attitude toward personal problems. In addition, she creates social situations which the students dramatize. Subjects such as a line-up of people at an employment agency are interjected. From time to time, themes are initiated by students; these themes often include serious "adult" conflicts, such as divorced parents, drug abuse, and robberies. While Mrs. Wasserman recognizes the therapeutic value of improvising such controversies, at the same time she is fearful of evoking deep-seated emotions in young people. Untrained in the field of psychodrama, she restrains the group from focusing on family problems. At times she will go so far as to halt the improvisation if it is causing profound emotional disturbance; she prefers to follow up such reaction with discussion if she deems it essential. Now and then she sets up happy situations, e.g. problem of a girl

wanting to date a certain boy without success; suddenly her life changes, and she becomes very popular. Mrs. Wasserman is of the opinion that it is constructive to provide children with a note of hope in relation to their environment.

Field trips to theatre and films provide an additional opportunity for group experience. Social adjustment is further promoted by the sense of belonging which these outings offer. While her emphasis on group dynamics affect all children, specific students who remain underachievers in school become keen participants in Dora Wasserman's group. She attributes this phenomenon to the fact that she encourages activity, while the schools favour passivity in students. Here, again, her theory is similar to that of Viola Spolin:

> Intensity of involvement should be the guage of children's capacities and potential. Children with the lowest grades in school may be the most creative. Their involvement, unfortunately, is not stimulated by what is at hand. [17]

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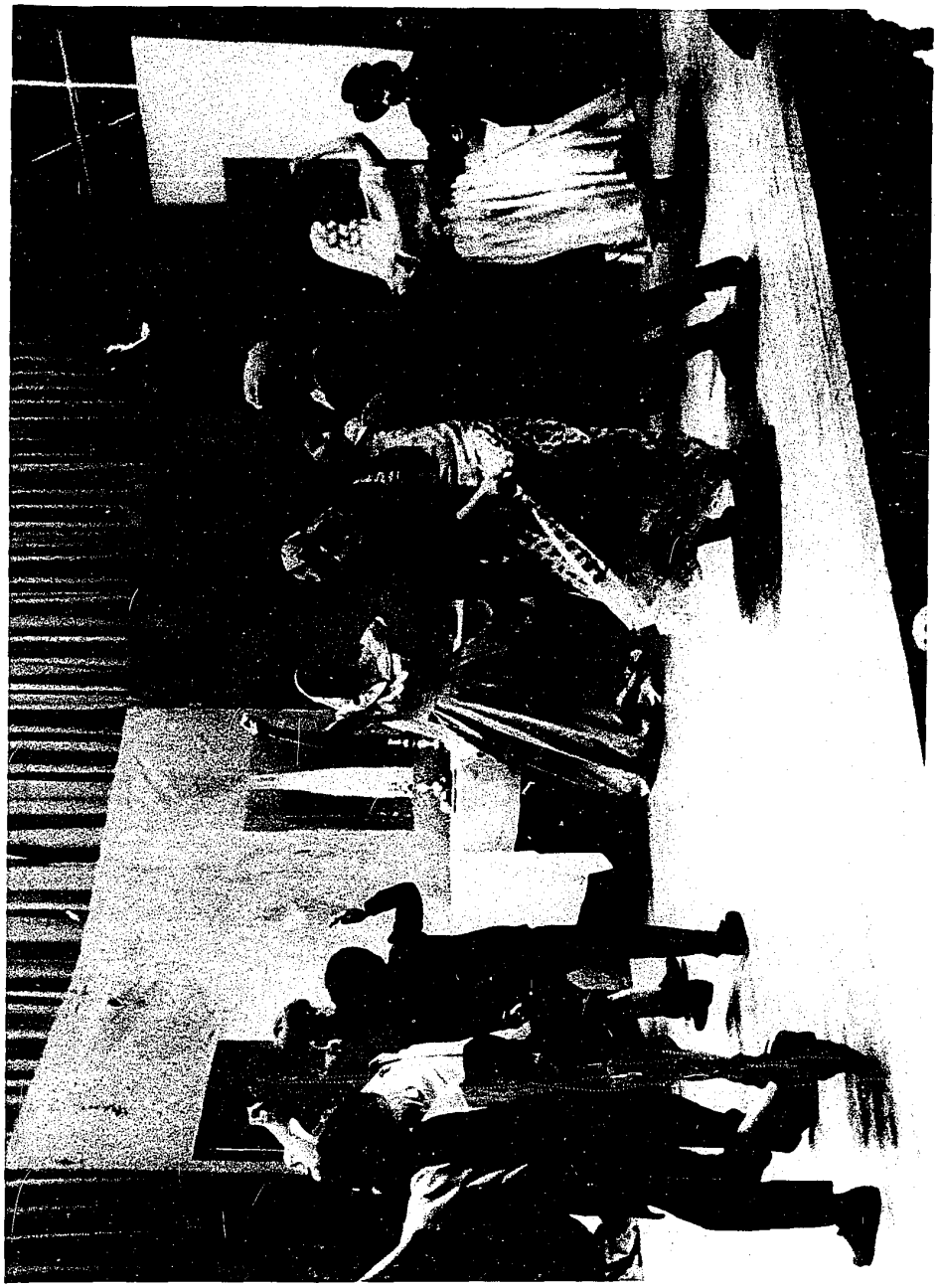
17 Spolin, op. cit., p. 288.

Performances given by the group in hospitals and convalescent homes similarly contribute to the child's social training and awareness of community needs. Recently, the group entertained at Maimonides Hospital, a geriatric home, where the

children pushed patients in wheel chairs, helped them get settled for the show, and communicated with them on a personal level. A short, musical play was presented in an open space, among the audience, which is their custom in this type of presentation. Using the reverse approach of Canadian adult companies which encourage child participation, Mrs. Wasserman's group of youngsters invite adult participation, bringing the adults on stage to dance with them and join the action. Mrs. Wasserman seats her new students in the front seats; when the cast comes into the audience, they bring these students on stage first. In this way, the idea becomes spontaneous, and the rest of the audience readily joins in. Elderly people dance, and the youngsters bring joy to senior citizens. It is very possible that Dora Wasserman's years in the Kazakh republic, where she acted informally with untrained, instinctive actors for a primitive audience, engendered the spontaneous participation which she fosters in her groups.

In line with her goal of placing personal development before perfect production, her motivation in casting will often be aimed at individual ego building. Pressure to achieve must be avoided at all costs. She will not allow herself or hired specialists to drive her casts; instead she guides them with a firm hand in character creation, criticizing and encouraging in turn, resorting to "showing them how" only when all other types of direction have failed.

P L A T E IV



The Happy Tailor, presented by the Children's Drama Group of the Jewish Public Library, Spring, 1969.

To help her students to create the "inner life" of a role, Mrs. Wasserman occasionally employs Stanislavski's technique of emotion memory.

> Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced. They may seem to be beyond recall, when suddenly a suggestion, a thought, a familiar object will bring them back in full force. Sometimes the emotions are as strong as ever, sometimes weaker, sometimes the same strong feelings will come back but in a different guise.[18]

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[18] Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares, (New York: Theatre Arts Books, Robert M. MacGregor, 1951), 17th ed., p. 57.

It seems evident that Mrs. Wasserman attempts to inspire the student's sincere belief in his actions. In fact, the achievement of "truth" in action is the underlying motivation in all class exercises and improvisations. She supplies her youngsters with a given set of circumstances which will set fire to their imaginations and energize a feeling of belief in their performance. In addition, she frequently builds objectives in improvisations to provide students with valid motivation to aid "truth" e.g. she will place an object on the floor; their objective is to steal it when she is caught off guard. They are therefore obliged to invent attention-diverting suggestions to reach the given objective.

Similarly, Mrs. Wasserman guides her students to achieve truthful playing in productions by providing parallel situations or <u>études</u>[19] to act out when creating a role. This practice is in line with Stanislavski's suggestion that the goal of every exercise must be to take on the reality of the play.[20]

[19] Etude - an improvisation created by the director on the same theme as the play, with the actors in the characters they are portraying. The situation must be close to the actors' personal experience and of the same nature as the situation in the play.

Nikolai M. Gorchakov, <u>Stanislavski Directs</u>, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls and Co., 1954), p. 399.

[20] Constantin Stanislavski, <u>Stanislavski's Legacy</u>, (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968), 3rd., p. 141.

<u>Improvisations</u>, often built around a theme suggested by Mrs. Wasserman, are acted in pairs or groups. She further prompts students to utilize available objects to augment the action. If required, she will feed stimuli during an improvisation to keep the action going. At times, she will supply these cues in the guise of a character in the scene.

Occasionally, the class is divided in half, to enact identical ideas; one particular student is selected as director of the group. Mrs. Wasserman thus provides the child with an opportunity to lead his peers; he thereby learns how to influence but not dominate a

situation. She considers leadership training valuable both for social living and for theatre.

The divided-class method has a further objective, Mrs. Wasserman states; it is designed to encourage originality of presentation; this point is underlined for the student when representations of the same motif are individually interpreted. The effect results in an avoidance of stereotyped rendition of scripts. This method may be traced back to Dora Wasserman's acting years with TUSE, where scripts were frequently produced with alternate casts and sets, resulting in two individual interpretations of the same play.

It must be remembered that Mrs. Wasserman's students are improvising in a second language. Consequently, they frequently mispronounce words and make grammatical errors. In an effort to combine the teaching of Yiddish with drama, she interrupts improvisations to correct pronunciation and grammar. She notes that this intervention, rather than impeding dramatic flow, enhances it. Each time she checks them, students must recommence and become re-absorbed; this procedure of re-creation serves to promote concentration.

Concentration and imagination are additionally furthered when her students create objects from workshop props. Chairs, their favorite articles, are converted into houses or bridges. These

structures stimulate ideas for scenes which are presently improvised.

Because concentration is the basis on which truth depends, additional exercises are introduced to develop this skill. For example, she involves her students in a common action such as walking to school or reading a book; at an appropriate interval she will create unexpected distracting sounds such as water running, or steady tapping. If concentration is intense, the interference causes a notable reaction.

Other exercises to aid concentration are combined with body movement. In her constant endeavor to stimulate belief, Mrs. Wasserman introduces familiar actions to her students, such as swimming, rather than obscure activities, which will impede concentration and obstruct the imagination. Stanislavski suggests that "the truth of physical actions" is an avenue of approach to "delicate emotional experiences and strong tragic moments". He further recommends that the actor concentrate on his actions, rather than his emotions. "Think about what you have to do".[21]

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[21] Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares, p. 142.

Similarly, Mrs. Wasserman considers that belief in external physical action leads to the evocation of sincere emotion.

Body movement and physical expression are further improved in her workshop by relaxation exercises, which free the body from

superfluous tensions, and facilitate creative activity. This ability to relax the body is necessary in ordinary life as well as theatre. Although Mrs. Wasserman considers music to be conducive to relaxation, she does not work with recorded music, because she prefers the flexibility of live music for drama exercises. She is hoping that the Jewish Public Library will provide her with a pianist next year.

Body movement is further encouraged through the art of mime. Exercises in her workshop are confined to occupational mime exercises and simple mime scenes. Her object in these scenes is to teach students conveyance of action and sense without speech. The acquisition of this skill adds another dimension to the performance of the actor; equally important, it serves as a communication skill.

Like Developmental Drama practitioners who believe that the senses are avenues leading to the imagination, Mrs. Wasserman introduces exercises to promote sense awareness. She stimulates her students to discover through exercises of the blind and deaf, the consequent sharpening of the other senses. The students often commence by personating a blind person walking around the room; next they are prompted to portray blind people in various situations or professions - a blind musician is a favorite role of her students. They choose various instruments (imaginary) to act out this role.

> How can we teach unobservant people to notice what nature and life are trying to show them? First of all they must be taught to look at, to listen to, and to hear...[22]

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22 Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares, p. 87.

Exercises to develop accurate observation are carried out through the use of pictures, and by inviting observation of detail in dress of others in the room. These exercises serve to promote the pupil's concentration, to strengthen his memory recall, and to cultivate his sense of observation. Richard Boleslavsky, in his outline of basic elements essential to the actor's craft, includes the gift of observation.

> It helps the student of the theatre to notice everything unusual and out of order in everyday life. It builds his memory, his storage memory, with all visible manifestations of the human spirit. It makes him sensitive to sincerity and to make-believe. It develops his sensory and muscular memory, and facilitates his adjustment to any business he may be required to do in a part. It opens his eyes to the full extent in appreciation of different personalities and values in people and works of art. And lastly...it enriches his inner life by full and extensive consumption of everything in outward life.[23]

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23 Richard Boleskavsky, Acting, The First Six Lessons (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1933), p. 97.

The above qualities, it seems clear, could be considered vital attributes, not only for the actor, but for any individual who aspires to live a creative life.

Dora Wasserman, brought up and educated in a rich cultural environment in Russia, feels restricted in her work with Canadian students. This restriction is largely the result of residing in a country where drama schools are not government sponsored, and where artistic education is placed on a lower level of importance than other academic subjects. For instance, in her own studio, she is financially unable to hire specialists in such fields as voice production, body movement, and set design which ideally should comprise basic elements of a theatre arts program. In addition, her pupils are underexposed to theatre; in fact, they are underexposed to the performing arts in general.

For this reason, she advocates employment of qualified teachers in the elementary and high schools to develop creative potential in children, as well as an active program of theatre viewing implemented in all schools. But, theatre viewing, she emphatically states, must take place in city theatres, disassociated from the school environment. Only then will young people recognize theatre as "something special; that to go to theatre represents a 'yomtov', a holiday".

Mrs. Wasserman recalls attending a French production for students at the Gesu Theatre in Montreal. Busloads of youngsters

were transported from the schools to attend the play. This is precisely the type of theatre that she envisions here on a regular basis.[24]

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[24] La Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale offers first-rate professional productions designed for Francophone students. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent Montreal English company.

In order to house professional Children's Theatres, Mrs. Wasserman confirms, the government must subsidize them; they cannot be self-supporting because the income is too small. At present, she notes that groups of four actors visit city schools and present child-participation plays.[25] While these presentations are worthwhile

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[25] Youtheatre, a Montreal based group directed by Wayne Fines, has been touring English speaking-schools for the past four years.

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as an activity, Mrs. Wasserman does not recognize them as "real theatre". Theatre, she feels, must afford children "an opportunity to see the classics, to acquire a knowledge of literature, and to develop a taste for the theatre".

Mrs. Wasserman envisions a studio similar to the National Theatre School,[26] operated in French, English, or any other

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[26] The National Theatre School's three-year program includes courses in voice and speech, movement, theatre history, acting technique, and stage management and design conducted by specialists in these fields .

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language, designed to offer talented students theatre training. In this proposed drama school teachers would be authorized to recommend promising pupils; the studio would then allow these candidates two years to decide whether or not they wished to continue in the program. Referrals by High Schools would also be invited, and the High School system would include drama instruction within its structure. A professional adult theatre for children would be affiliated with the studio.[27]

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27 These recommendations are all based on the type of operation Mrs. Wasserman was exposed to in Russia:-
a) state theatre schools
b) student referrals to these schools
c) a two-year probationary period
d) exposure of pupils to live theatre comprising repertoire of first quality, and productions of high artistic standards.

By providing her students with theatre viewing, Dora Wasserman offers them a group theatre experience in which each child participates vicariously as a member of the audience. Because the psyche of the child identifies with those on stage, the play can provide him, she believes, with immediate response and "real" experiences. This "taking in" combined with the "giving out" of direct experience during play acting, unite to provide the child with enjoyment and personal growth.

P L A T E V

Madame Jean-Louis Audet, 1890-1970.

MADAME JEAN-LOUIS AUDET: A DISCIPLINED FREEDOM

Madame Jean-Louis Audet, "directice-fondatrice" of a school of speech and drama,[1] is remembered for her "l'amour du théâtre et la passion de parler une langue française nette, claire, précise, franche...".[2] Thousands of French-Canadian children in this province were directly influenced by her philosophy of phonetics, her work on the voice, her theatre presentations, and her knowledge of literature. She continued to teach until almost the time of her death.

[1] Madame Audet's school was never given a name.

[2] Marc Thibeault, "Mme Jean-Louis Audet: Elle a lancé Monique Miller, Marjolaine Hébert, Robert Gadouas, Yvette Brind'Amour, Andrée Champagne, Gisèle Schmidt, Lise Lasalle, Pierre Dagenais, etc., etc., etc., etc...!"
Le Journal Des Vedettes, 14 Fevrier, 1960, p. 19.

Quebecoise by birth, Madame Audet was a product of a rich French cultural environment. This international outlook coupled with a strong attachment to French Canada provided her with the incentive to preserve the French language and culture in Canada. Because she felt that language and culture were closely linked, she chose to dedicate her life to teaching speech. She believed that the most effective means to conserve an individual language

and culture was through its youth, and therefore devoted forty years to instructing children.

A natural love of the theatre stimulated her to teach voice and speech through this medium. Many of her former pupils, obviously motivated by the acting experience, continued on in theatre work, and are now leading French-Canadian actors.

Born Yvonne Duckett in Sorel, Quebec, of French-Canadian parents, Madame Audet exhibited her love of acting at an early age; as a small child she improvised little plays and sang for the family group.

She attended Ecole St. Léon,[3] where she participated in

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[3] Ecole St. Léon was a convent on St. Denis Street, Montreal, operated by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

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scenes from classical plays. One of six children (three boys and three girls), she displayed her intellectual capacities, competitive spirit, and ambitious nature by teaching herself Latin and Greek, thereby emulating her brothers who had the advantage of attending classical college.[4] This interest in languages remained throughout

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[4] Conversation with Madame Audet's elder son, Jean-Marc Audet, June, 1972.

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her long life.

By the age of sixteen, she had decided that she would be either an actress or an opera singer or both! She studied singing with Professor Salvator Issaurel, and French diction with Professor René du Roure, of McGill University.[5]

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[5] Thibeault, op. cit., p. 19.

As a young married woman,[6] she registered her small sons at

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[6] Madame Audet married Dr. Jean-Louis Audet, dentist, in 1912.

Le Conservatoire Lasalle. Madame Lassalle, director of children's classes, staged children's productions of the classics once or twice a year at His Majesty's or the Gesu Theatre. Invited by Madame Lassalle, Madame Audet agreed to coach the singers at rehearsals of these shows. Inspired by this work, she enrolled in the adult course at Le Conservatoire in 1926. Georges Landreau, her teacher, was devoted to French phonetics. When Madame Audet commenced classes, he had just published his first book on the subject.[7]

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[7] Georges Landreau, son of Madame Lassalle, wrote La Phonétique Française in 1926, the first book of its kind to be published in Canada; he then followed it with Livre de L'Elève.

Jean Béraud, "Le Conservatoire Lassalle," La Presse, Montreal, Samedi 6, 1962, p. 9.

Three years later, Madame Audet received her Grand Diplôme D'Honneur from Le Conservatoire Lassalle, and in 1930 was awarded her Diplôme Universitaire D'Elocution Française by the University of Montreal. Both diplomas were granted "avec grande distinction". Before deciding on teaching as a career, she collaborated as "conférençière et aide-directrice à l'occasion, à l'Heure Provinciale dirigée par Monsieur Edouard Montpetit et Henri Letondal...". Through participation in these literary evenings and conferences, she developed a taste for teaching.

In 1933, she opened a studio[8] in the large finished basement

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[8] Madame Audet credits Monsieur Montpetit with inspiring her to open her studio.

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of her St. Hubert Street cottage. She began with one course a week; by 1960, however, she was giving two or three courses a day six days a week. In addition, she taught phonetics at various convents or schools, such as l'Ecole Supérieure d'Outremont, and Le Conservatoire National de Montréal. For twenty years she gave courses at l'Ecole Vincent d'Indy d'Outremont; for ten years she taught classes at the University of Montreal; she also instructed at Le Conservatoire d'Art dramatique de la province de Québec.

In addition to her full teaching schedule, Madame Audet held Sunday rehearsals for twice-weekly concerts presented by her

group at city schools and various other organizations.[9] Wearing

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9 Conversation with actress Marjolaine Hébert, director of Théâtre de Marjolaine.

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simple costumes, the youngsters would interpret folklore songs and dances "d'une manière vivante et naturelle". Some of them would present the poems or monologues that they had learned in class.

> ...Et voilà pourquoi le monologue reste toujours une épreuve difficile à subir en public. Il y a par contre, des morçeaux qui peuvent être donnés avec mise en scène. Encore faut-il être sûr l'habilité de l'interprète. C'est ainsi qu'une de mes très bonnes élèves récitait 'La Ballade de la Brise', de Zamecois, dans un simple décor stylisé, en robe assise auprès d'un rouet, avec musique de scène et jolis éclairages. On peut donner en costume une Légende bretonne; un extrait arrangé en monologue des 'Deux Pierrots', d'Edmond Rostand. En une mot, il faut créer l'atmosphère...10

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10 Audet, op. cit., p. 220.

Now and then her students were invited to organize performances on certain themes; for these events she frequently wrote her own scripts. She describes the type of concert the group would give when invited by those in the medical field.

> On invite souvent nos enfants à des matinées ou soirées consacrées à l'Hygiène. Ces démonstrations se donnent d'habitude dans des salles d'école, des salles d'hôpital. Parmi les invités d'honneur, des médecins, des professeurs, sans oublier monsieur le Curé. Les parents son là, avec leurs enfants. Nous avons pour ces occasions tout un programme de saynètes, chansons, monologues et petits choeurs, demandant une mise en scène peu compliquée, et traitant des 'Globules', du bon Docteur Tant-Mieux, du dentiste qui reçoit les enfants à la clinique, des gardes dévouées. Le public s'amuse tout en s'instruisant...[11]

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[11] Ibid., p. 59.

Sometimes her group presented for the schools scenes from the classics such as L'Ecole des Femmes by Molière, and on occasion took these shows to schools out of town.

From 1936 to 1950, Madame Audet also exposed her youngsters to radio productions. She directed them in Le Petit-Monde, which was a weekly half-hour series. On this show, the young children presented recitations and short dialogues which had been learned in class, while one of the older pupils, as host, introduced each number. Le Petit-Monde played on CRCM, CHLP, CKAC, and CBC consecutively.

Madeleine et Pierre, 1937 to 1950, was a five day weekly half-hour series on CKAC, written and directed by her son, André Audet. It was sponsored by The Kellogg Company of Canada, and as

a commercial venture, had to be of a more professional calibre. The cast consisted largely of Madame Audet's more experienced students; moreover, characters in the scripts were often created to suit particular children. In 1941, André Audet staged the show at Monument Nationale, and from that time on he wrote an annual stage revue in which he featured the radio cast.[12]

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[12] Conversations with actresses Marjolaine Hébert, Monique Miller, actor Rolland D'Amour, and CKAC programmer Jeannette Brouillet, Fall, 1971, and Jean-Marc Audet, June, 1972.

Although Madame Audet constantly involved her students in radio and stage productions, her prime goal remained voice and speech training. Determined to improve the standard of Canadian French, she attempted to reach as many children as possible. In keeping with her goal, she accepted in her studio all students, regardless of financial situation. As a result, the classes were always a mixture of the rich and poor; indeed her lack of interest in finances was such that seventy-five percent of her pupils were non-paying.[13]

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[13] Conversation with Jean-Marc Audet, June, 1972.

Without denying her French-Canadian heritage, Madame Audet possessed as well an international outlook. As a specialist in the

linguistic field, she participated in the Congrès de Langue Française, and eventually served on the board of Le Société de Parler français au Canada.[14]

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[14] Le Société du Parler français au Canada was founded in 1902, its aim being "l'étude, la conservation, et le perfectionnement de la langue française, écrite et parlée au Canada".

Mark M. Orkin, Speaking Canadian French, (Toronto: General Publishing Co., 1971), 2nd ed., p. 14.

Constantly interested in diverse languages and cultures, she journeyed each summer to universities in different parts of the world where she took courses in phonetics. She studied English at Columbia University, Spanish in Mexico, French at the Sorbonne, and German at the University of Strasbourg. She constantly travelled in order to increase her knowledge. In the summer of 1959, for example, she was in Roumania at the International Congress of folklore; in 1958 she visited Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Switzerland; in 1957 the Caribbean; in 1956, Germany.[15]

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[15] Thibeault, op. cit., p. 19.

The result of her travels, her studies, her years of teaching, are embodied in three lengthy studies:- Les Monologues du Petit-Monde, published in 1967, Manuel de Français Oral Phonétique et Diction

and Les Voyelles.[16]

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16 Manuel de Français Oral Phonétique et Diction was un unpublished manuscript presented by Madame Audet to l'Institut de diction française, in 1963, when she was honorary president. It would appear that she wrote a second volume, Les Voyelles, but I have been unable to locate it.

From time to time, she acted professionally on English CBC in dramatic shows directed by Rupert Caplan. Union des Artistes made her an honorary member.

Madame Audet received "la medaille de l'alliance francaise" in 1965, for her constant efforts to give her people "le trésor de la liberté" for, as David Benoit remarks, "un peuple n'est libre que s'il exprime dans sa langue...".[17]

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17 Benoit David, "L'Alliance Française Honore Mme Jean-Louis Audet", Le Journal Des Vedettes, 5 Juin, 1965, p. 34.

But over and above language, she gave to her students their literary heritage. At the dinner preceding the presentation, Lise Lapierre movingly summarized Madame Audet's contribution:

> ...Lorsque J'AVAIS DIX ANS, vous m'avez fait connaître Alceste, Néron, Britannicus; vous m'avez présenté mes amis d'aujourd'hui: Sophocle, Eurypide, Aristophane, Shakespeare, Racine, Molière, Corneille, Mariveaux, Beaumarchais, Musset, Hugo, Lamartine, Voltaire, Rousseau... Ah, combien d'amis fidèles n'avez vous pas lancés pour la route de mes désespoirs pour qu'ils me tendent la main aux heures les plus noires de ma vie!

J'avais DIX ans. Merci, madame. Dix ans...[18]

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18 Lise Lapierre, "...leur métier c'est grâce à Madame Jean-Louis Audet, et c'est pour cela qu'ils lui ont rendu un hommage aussi émouvant", Echos Vedettes, 3 Juillet, 1965, p. 15.

After a long and energetic life, Madame Audet died in October, 1970, at the age of eighty.

PHILOSOPHY

"La Femme Au Service de La Langue Française"

As a member of the Board of the Société du Parler français au Canada, Madame Audet was a direct successor to the dedicated amateur linguists of the mid-nineteenth century. Her education at Le Conservatoire Lassalle had qualified her as a phonetician, furnished her with an international French pronunciation, immersed her in classical literature, and inspired a dedication to conserve the purity and spirit of the French language. Here, too, she came in contact with major luminaries [19] of the French theatre of the period, which no doubt increased her attachment to theatre arts.

[19] Eugène Lassalle, well-known French actor, was artistic director of "Théâtre des Nouveautés" in Montreal. When the company folded due to financial difficulties, all the actors except Mr. Lassalle returned to France. He remained to dedicate himself to French Canadian theatre. His wife, Louise Larcey, was a leading actress.

By the time she opened her studio, then, she was steeped in a rich cultural French tradition. Possessed of a gay, independent spirit,[20] she projected a joy in language, life, and theatre.

[20] As a young mother, she sang in operas and operettas both on stage and radio under an assumed name, since acting by women was socially unacceptable at that time.

Devoted to the classics, she exposed her students to first-rate literature, and frequently took them to see professional theatre.

Although the developing of actors was a secondary goal in her work, an outstanding number of first rate French-Canadian actors evolved out of her training program. Her insistence on a secure foundation of phonetics equipped them with vocal technique. Her emphasis on natural and sincere qualities of movement and speech promoted spontaneity. Exposure to the classical masters facilitated creative acting. In addition, her nurturing of the personality, and her encouragement of individual interpretation and subjective approach to literature, provided students with a solid foundation with which to forge ahead in theatre careers.

As a French Canadian, Madame Audet was aware of the distinct Quebecois expressions which differentiated Quebec French from the language of the mother country. Accordingly, she allowed some latitude for new pronunciations, but in general, her attitude toward the instruction of language remained rigid and exact throughout her life.

She chided the method of classroom teachers who taught written French to the exclusion of oral French. Since the students were ignorant of the exact French pronunciation, there was little value in their being taught written grammar. She found it ironical

that when learning a foreign language, one is first taught phonetics; in Quebec, however, the elementary phonetics of a domestic language were being ignored. She insisted that each school employ a specialist in oral French, and maintained that the simultaneous teaching of the two aspects of the language - oral and written - would produce a new generation which spoke and wrote its language precisely. Provincial speech would then disappear and a "langue française moderne" would emerge.[21]

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[21] Thibeault, op. cit., p. 19.

Madame Audet insisted that the teaching of exact sounds should commence at the nursery school level, so that common speech faults of French Canadians could be rectified at an early age. She noticed that young children's ears were generally sensitive to nuances of beautiful-sounding vowels, and provided that the teacher spoke perfectly, the pupils would quickly acquire the exact pronunciation, without rules or explanation.

The difficulty in vowel pronunciation was less marked in small children than in adolescents and teen-agers. Their ears had to be trained because they had lost their former sensitivity to sounds. Madame Audet maintained that there was no fixed length of time required to educate the ear, but felt the aptitude of the individual student was the determining factor.

Madame Audet considered the power of voice and speech capable of altering individuals and nations. Speech released personal expression and promoted communication; speech was theatre; speech vitalized the innate spirit and cultural expression of its nation.

Body movement and gesture, subordinates to the speaking voice, were commentators upon speech. They merely served to underline vocal inflections, and were motivated by the spoken word. At the same time, Madame Audet believed that gestures grew out of personality, and that the teacher, therefore, should not impose them.[22]

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[22] The student must be made aware, however, of technique in the formal use of gesture for artistic presentation. He must be familiar with the various kinds, and must realize that certain classical styles demand a corresponding type of gesture.

Voice, however, was the key to the discovery and expression of personality. Madame Audet believed that the acquisition of a solid foundation of vocal skills freed the individual to express his latent personal identity. Similarly, vocal training furthered communication; as she phrased it, "Personne n'est insensible au charme d'une belle voix". She recommended that vocal charm be developed through regular voice exercises, followed by the putting of oneself in a happy frame of mind.[23] This philosophy is allied

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[23] Madame Jean-Louis Audet, Les Monologues du Petit-Monde, (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin Ltée., 1967), p. 195.

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with the Victorian principle of laughter being the best medicine, but also closely parallels the thinking of modern Developmental Drama practitioners who associate relaxation with emotion and speech. "Je me plais toujours à vanter les systèmes modernes 'd'Education par la Joie.'"[24]

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[24] Ibid., p. 121.

While her emphasis on joy has much in common with contemporary thinking, her views on relaxation exercises differ. Although Madame Audet stressed the value of relaxation in speech work, she was singularly opposed to specific types of exercises designed to teach relaxation. Relaxation was achieved, she believed, by altering the mental image; tension was automatically eliminated by changing from one activity to another. An atmosphere of tranquility, security, and enjoyment was further established by her ritual of commencing and terminating lessons at the piano.[25]

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[25] Conversation with Jean-Marc Audet, June, 1972.

A prime requisite for learning, this secure climate advanced the child in his difficult vocal studies.

Although Madame Audet stressed the mechanics of voice and speech, she knew, nevertheless, that this technical approach was but one aspect of projecting inflection and meaning. Original speech

and original acting demanded logical and emotional phrasing to enrich vocal interpretation. In other words, inflection was guided by a combination of thought, emotion, and vocal technique. Her view in that context resembles that of contemporary speech authorities:

> The voice, however perfect, will never touch the heights unless it is directed by a sensitive perception of the meaning and emotion to be conveyed,...it acquires a disciplined freedom; disciplined in the sense that it is correctly managed and controlled, free in the sense that it is flexible, pliant, and responsive to the intention. 26

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26 Clifford J. Turner, Voice and Speech in the Theatre, (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1950), 2nd ed., p. 134.

Madame Audet's emphasis on personal expression within a technical structure foreshadows the writings of "authorities on speech", such as H. St. John Rumsey, Anne H. McAllister, and Wilton Cole.

When the student attained the balance between personal expression and vocal discipline, his latent personality emerged.

This cultivation of the personality and emphasis on the individual at a time when choral speech was popular, places Madame Audet ahead of her time. She was convinced that choral work, even in its best sense as "a co-operative enterprise of teacher and every single member of the class for the interpretation of poetry"[27], stifled

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27 Mona Swann, An Approach to Choral Speech, (Massachusetts: Walter H. Baker Co., 1937), p. 10.

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personality. Her progressive attitude toward individuality becomes all the more significant when one considers that she taught in a period of educational regimentation within a comparatively depersonalized, monolithic society.

Among the students who had been exposed to the study of diction, Madame Audet noticed an additional problem. These young people were in effect speaking two languages:- a) French Canadian, which was "ni français, ni anglais", [28] and b) what Madame Audet

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28 ...appreciable differences exist between spoken Canadian French and standard French...Canadian French was subjected much more intimately to the influence of English...
Orkin, op. cit., p. 73.

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referred to as their "langue du dimanche".

> L'enfant parle correctement pour jouer son rôle, pour dire son monologue, puis, crac! sauf quelque mots par-ci par-là, il retombe dans sa langue première, une langue étriquée, sans couleur. 29

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29 Audet, op. cit., p. 204.

Madame Audet was not disturbed by psychological reasons for maintaining accents. She was of the opinion that there were two ways of speaking language - correctly, and incorrectly. In order to make proper diction become habitual speech, she advocated the

use of correct pronunciation at all times in all situations.

She considered that the French-Canadian people had a personal debt and obligation to their ancestors, to keep "le véritable esprit français" alive in Canada. Because cultural survival, she believed, was retained through the national language, she advocated a thorough reorganization of phonetic instruction in the schools. She felt that "la langue maternelle" was an inheritance that was passed on from one generation to the next; thus the best way to improve the language on an extensive scale was through a revolution in phonetic instruction. It was the duty of educators to provide youth with a purer pronunciation and a richer vocabulary as a cultural base. This combination of correct speech with exposure to fine French literature would result, she was certain, in a new generation of French Canadians with a strong sense of cultural identity, whose basic thinking and manner of speaking "soit bien française".

METHODOLOGY

Madame Audet's studio functioned as a classroom for both pupils and mothers; she encouraged the latter to observe classes so that they too could benefit from phonetic instruction. Possibly she felt that the mother's improved French would alleviate the child's fear of ridicule; mother and child would both begin to speak a cultivated French at home. She also included four or five more experienced children in a class of new students. She noticed that these older students' ease would project to the others, and help to reduce shyness.

Madame Audet's exercises are detailed in her book, Les Monologues du Petit-Monde. Unlike contemporary speech practitioners, who commence with breathing exercises, Madame Audet began "le cours des petits", conducted for children from three to eleven years, with articulation exercises. These exercises for lip flexibility were done by the class as a group; then individually starting with the words papa, maman, etc., in order to discover individual faults of students. Madame Audet expected her youngsters to practise these exercises carefully and slowly every day, keeping the rhythm and measure of the syllables, at the same time remembering to breathe properly and articulate well.

Ba, bé, bi, bo, bu.
Bla, blé, bli, blo, blu.
Cra, cré, cri, cro, cru.
Jma, jmé, jmi, jmo, jmu.
Fa, fé, fi, fo, fu.
Va, vé, vi, vo, vu.
Chta, chté, chti, chto, chtu.
Chla, chlé, chli, chlo, chlu.
Ksa, ksé, ksi, kso, ksu,

Pa-pa, ma-man (3 fois). Toi et moi (3 fois).
Oui - aujourd'hui - toujours (3 fois).

Ce bel enfant est grand, aimant; il s'appelle
Jean Clément (3 fois).
Le bambin prend son bain (3 fois).
Léon passera un an à Milan (3 fois).
Fruit cuit, fruit cru (3 fois).
IL-LU-SI-ON (3 fois avec la voix,
3 fois sans la voix).

Bonjour, lundi. Comment vas-tu, mardi?
Très bien, mercredi. Je viens de la part
de jeudi, te redire vendredi, qui'il faut
t'apprêter samedi, d'aller à l'église
dimanche. Combien ces cinq aucissons-ci?
Ce sera cinq sous ces cinq aucissons-ci.

Le chasseur chasse avec son chien.
Six chasseurs chassent avec six chiens.
Soixante-six chasseurs chassent avec
soixante-six chiens.

The child was to take a particular stance during exercises.

> Position. - L'enfant se tient très droit, debout, les mains derrière les dos. Attitude ferme, sans raideur. Il faut bien séparer les sons de la même ligne, mais sans respirer, et ne pas lever les épaules en aspirant. On respire après chaque ligne. [30]

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30 Audet, op. cit., p. 11.

In keeping with her strong belief in the "individual" in voice work, however, Madame Audet never gave the whole class the same material to study; each student was presented with a piece that suited his or her personality. She knew that "l'uniformité engendre la monotonie, ennui, et finalement, l'inattention". [31]

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31 Ibid., p. 11.

Except for specific articulation exercises which the class delivered together, she did only individual work with students. While she insisted on a standard pronunciation, Madame Audet encouraged individual interpretation. This individual interpretation grew out of the child's particular pitch, timbre and voice register, and out of his subjective manner of expressing his feelings. The teacher's role was simply to correct basic faults; it was not his function to impose his own intonation. This approach allowed a give-and-take between the student and his material. Exposure to literature, then, enriched the child's imagination and appreciation; he in turn enhanced the literature by marking it with the stamp of his own personality.

Although Madame Audet enforced a particular stance on her students, she did not impose gesture. She insisted only that the gestures they chose be motivated and natural. As with intonation,

she believed that the teacher must allow the student individual expression; she must merely guide him to employ gestures that were "juste, simple, complet". Classical styles, however, demanded a more formal, stylized type of gesture, and required a conventional technique.

In special cases, Madame Audet worked privately with pupils to correct speech impediments. She provided them with exercises, then showed them how to verify proper placement of the vocal organs with a mirror. This combination generally accomplished the task within a month's time; it also built up sufficient confidence in the child to enable him to join his peers in their class. [32]

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[32] Audet, op. cit., p. 65.

Confidence was considered to be a vital factor in every student's rate of progression. Madame Audet's approach to building self-confidence was unlike that of Developmental Drama practitioners who provide students with imaginary situations in order to help them to develop their own resources. She furnished her students with texts, and within a framework of sight readings, prepared speeches, and articulation exercises, she encouraged them to develop their own interpretative skills under her guidance. This was the springboard which would lead them to project their own latent personality.

As she said to one of her pupils:

> "...Un jour viendra où vous trouverez
> SEUL le manière de dire tout ce que
> vous voudrez. Plus d'imitation servile.
> Et ce jour-là, vous aurez trouvé en
> même temps ce que tout être humain
> possède de plus précieux: la personnalité." [33]

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33 Ibid., p. 212.

Because Madame Audet believed that young children's sensitive ears could quickly pick up precise sounds, she gave them poetry to learn which stressed vowels. These amusing poems combined fun and gaiety with learning. [34]

34

LES BELLES VOYELLES

-A,A,A! - Qu'est-ce que cela?
-Allons, c'est une voyelle.
Tu ne peux pas dire, ma belle,
Maman ni papa, sans la voyelle A.
-E,E,E! - Tu l'as deviné?, etc.

Ibid., p. 70.

Because she was distressed by the flat intonation of the French-Canadian voice, Madame Audet advocated a happy frame of mind to improve monotonous vocal qualities. She tried to imbue her students with an attitude of happiness and good humour throughout the day. She felt that "La langue française...est belle,claire et souriante" and counselled her students:

> Donnez à votre voix des intonations musicales. Apprenez à dire de beaux vers. Dites tous les matins, après vos exercises: "Je souris, Je ris, vive la gaieté". 35

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35 Ibid., p. 184.

She was convinced that regular vocal exercises and a happy frame of mind were an essential combination in the development of "charm" in the voice. She further provided them with poems to recite to develop tone color and a sense of rhythm which she felt were generally lacking in French-Canadian speech; "la voix est grise, les phrases précipitées, la respiration mal réglée." [36]

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36 Ibid., p. 223.

Pierre Daviault in his description of "La langue française au Canada" in Royal Commission Studies, Ottawa, 1951, pp. 31-32, pronounces Canadian speech as "monotonous, heavy, and nasal in tone...qualities which distinguish it from the accents of France. Its pronunciation is gutteral, its articulation insufficient, and its intonation monotonous and colourless".
Orkin, op. cit., p. 73.

Moreover, she supplied them with beautiful descriptive verses in order to "poser la voix sur le médium", and graded her material from simple poems to dramatic material for the more experienced pupils. She felt that first of all the teacher must search and find

the "timbre" of each pupil, then give him, gradually, a repertoire of varied pieces, poetry and prose, of different styles: anecdote, lyric, comic, and oratory. She also felt that:

> Des scènes dialoguées sont excellentes pour habituer l'élève a sortir de lui-même et pour l'inviter à l'Art Dramatique. 37

37 Ibid., p. 224.

Because she noticed that the young child was closer to nature than the adult, Madame Audet chose themes of animals, flowers, and lakes in the poetry and fables which she gave her pupils to study. These were written by French Canadian as well as French writers. [38]

38 Gonzalve Desaulniers and Blanche Lamontagne were two Canadian writers whose work Madame Audet used.
Ibid., p. 118.

> L'enfant est plus près de la nature que l'adulte. Il vit d'une vie instantanée, perdu tout entier dans la perception du présent. Il est heureux près des fleurs, des animaux, des arbres. 39

39 Ibid., p. 112.

Madame Audet was of the opinion that legends and tales were excellent sources of material for the teaching of diction to young children. She advised the mothers of her small pupils to allow their youngsters to believe in these "beaux contes qui ont enchanté notre enfance"; she felt that imaginative stories had their place

in the education of three to seven-year olds. It was too soon for them to face cold reality. As her students grew older, she would explain the hidden symbolism and underlying meanings in the fiction. Her standards of repertoire remained high :

> Dans toute pédagogie, et surtout dans la pédagogie spéciale de la petite enfance, ce sont les qualités de mésure, de bon sens et de bon goût, qui assurent la victoire.[40]

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[40] Ibid., p. 164.

Madame Audet believed that fables were the purest models of literature for recitation. Because La Fontaine's messages could really only be understood by adults, very often the younger pupils would pout if they were asked to recite them. Madame Audet in turn attempted to make them love these fables. She suggested to school teachers that children be asked to recite fables "comme recompense", rather than "comme pensums", which was their usual practice.[41]

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[41] Ibid., p. 201.

In an effort to further foster an appreciation of literature, Madame Audet exposed her students to first quality playwrights. She gave her young students in "la section d'Art Dramatique" such ingenue roles as Agnes in Molière's L'Ecole des Femmes, and Toinette in his Le Malade Imaginaire.

> Dans une classe de jeunes élèves, on comprendra facilement que l'ingénuité est la rose qui fleurit le plus souvent. Les pièces de Molière, de Musset, de Marivaux, font une place d'honneur à l'ingénue, ce petit être exquis, moitié ange, moitié démon et ouvrant sur la vie ses grands yeux étonnés. 42

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42 Ibid., p. 230.

Madame Audet thought it important to vary each pupil's repertoire because she noticed that affectation sometimes developed in students who had repeated successes with the same piece. New material demanded intense concentration and thus diverted the student's attention from audience response.

> ...recherche exagérée des nuances, des détails, des arrêts trop prolongés, des petits airs entendus, comme si le public était incapable de comprendre. A ce jeu-là, on deviendrait vite cabotin. 43

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43 Audet, op. cit., p. 199.

This emphasis on sincere acting, coupled with vocal training, formed a solid foundation for those students who entered the professional theatre field. Others, who became oral French specialists, radio announcers, commentators, lawyers, or politicians, similarly benefited from Madame Audet's influence.

Unlike some of her contemporaries [44] who were creating

[44] Mademoiselle Camille Bernard, whose studio "Théâtre des Petits" operated roughly from 1930 to 1965, trained children from the ages of two to ten years to become actors and singers. She placed them in professional companies which played in Montreal, and sent them on tours with these companies.
Conversation with actress, Mimi Jutras, November, 1971.

"stars" out of small children, and in addition encouraging stage-door mothers, her approach remained process-oriented; student development was her prime concern.

In retrospect, it would appear that Madame Audet viewed herself as a missionary of the French language. With an almost evangelical dedication, she neglected finances, health, and social life to see to it that every French-Canadian child, regardless of financial situation, received phonetic instruction. Through lectures, interviews, and writing she battled for educational reform up to her old age, earning the gratitude of the thousands of pupils whose lives she so strongly influenced.

But Madame Audet's influence is far from having ended. Her concept of language and culture is already part of the Quebec educational philosophy. Her study of the voice with specific emphasis upon phonetics has had a profound influence on pedagogy in the province. Perhaps one day she will be widely recognized for her enormous contribution to Quebec education.

CONCLUSION

> Problems arise in Children's Theatre when there is a tendency to create a child star who develops an exaggerated sense of his importance, or when children are simply puppets in the hands of a teacher wishing to display his skill. The pressures which can be exerted on children during the stress of production can often be more than they are equipped to bear. [1]

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[1] John Richard Ross, "A Preliminary Study of the Historical Background, Educational Philosophy, and Future Development of Drama in Education in Canada," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Regina, Saskatchewan, 1958), p. 85.

One of the most persistent myths regarding Children's Theatre depicts the child as a string puppet being manipulated from afar by the puppeteer. In this representation the child obediently moves at his master's bidding without original thought, emotion, or will. Thus, the director stifles his creative spirit, while the adulation of the public "turns his head", and invests him with an exaggerated sense of his own importance.

In Canada, in recent years, the Children's Theatre has become increasingly isolated from, and disparaged by, the Developmental Drama theorists. It is argued that the method is ineffective at best

and harmful at worst. Some of the most frequent comments are as follows: a) Children's Theatre directors, in an attempt to build "child stars", appeal more to children's egos than to their desire for self-development, b) they impose on the child communication with an audience before he is psychologically prepared to cope, thus encouraging affectation and unnatural acting, and c) they force set patterns of thinking and acting on their student actors, thereby restricting originality.

There is no evidence that the three companies encompassed in the study conform to the stereotype. Child development has been described by the directors as a primary goal of their programs, with development of actors secondary. All were concerned with encouragement of naturalness and spontaneity, although the methods of promoting these qualities varied. Madame Audet insisted on natural speech and gesture within a framework of technique; Dora Wasserman initiated exercises to stimulate the emotions and the imagination; Miss Davis and Miss Walters drilled external technique to develop self-confidence, the precedent to natural acting. To counteract the star syndrome, Madame Audet frequently varied her students' repertoire, while the Children's Theatre directors systematically rotated casts of leading characters.

While the directors all maintained that they did not prematurely pressure children into performance, all strongly

encouraged it as part of the developmental process. They agreed that stage experience enhanced personal development in the sense that it a) afforded individual expression within a group b) encouraged co-operation and group participation c) facilitated language skills and e) provided intellectual and emotional communion between actor and audience.

Although Mrs. Wasserman alone deliberately promoted self-development through exercises, the other two schools indirectly encouraged it by emphasizing external craft as a prerequisite to self-confidence and inner resourcefulness. Because external skills were stressed to such a great extent by two of the schools, it may be possible that certain adult concepts of theatre were imposed on students, perhaps limiting ingenuity and inventiveness.

Self-aggrandizement has not been characteristically displayed; conversely, the directors have emerged as hard-working educators with a mutual love of children and theatre. They have skilfully employed the theatre as an educational mechanism to a) stimulate sensitivity b) generate enthusiasm and delight c) foster teamwork d) motivate achievement in diverse areas, and e) build a discriminating Montreal theatre audience.

Given these goals, it would seem that Children's Theatre and Developmental Drama have much in common. Their most significant

difference lies in their attitude toward performance for an audience. If, as Developmental Drama practitioners maintain, performance is indeed damaging to children, then why have these companies continued to flourish for such long periods of time? What accounts for their longevity, and what is their appeal?

Is it possible that theatre production provides the motivation lacking in Developmental Drama activities? While both methods afford the student participation in the imaginative experience, Children's Theatre further furnishes the child with the opportunity of sharing a group experience from its creation to its finale. It additionally permits the child to communicate artistic insights to an audience.

If motivation, as educators allege, is the key to learning, then play production may open doors to children in other areas of non-theatre study. It could lead them to seek acquisition of skills required for production, such as speech and language, body movement, music, dance, art, manual training, and many others.

There are many questions, many conflicting opinions, but no absolute answers. This reality is natural in any art form; there can be no final answers. The two methods, however, do not appear to have irrevocable conflicts in pedagogies; on the contrary, many of their differences seem superficial. Ideally, one would hope to evolve a merger of the two ideologies, a method which would have as its supreme and ultimate objective, the child's physical, sociological, intellectual, and emotional growth.

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