



The Significance of Michael Chekhov

In the words of 20th century masters:

Strasberg, Meisner, Vakhtangov, Clurman

*A studio production of Dickens' **A Cricket on the Hearth** included many young actors who had been exposed to Stanislavsky's experiments, among them Michael Chekhov (...) (And Eugene Vakhtangov) for the first time, Stanislavsky heard those deep and heartfelt notes of super-conscious feeling that he had been striving for. The old actors of the Moscow Art Theatre began to pay a great deal more attention to Stanislavsky's pronouncements about the new methods of acting. His ideas began to ripen and become more precisely phrased and defined.*

Lee Strasberg, A dream of Passion
Little brown and Co., Boston C. 1987 by Davada Enterprises LTD.

Michael Chekhov...made me realize that truth, as in naturalism, was far from the whole truth. In him I witnessed exciting theatrical form with no loss of inner content, and I knew I wanted that too.

Sanford Meisner, Sanford Meisner On Acting
Sanford Meisner & Dennis Longwell, Randon house, Inc. New York, 1987

Vakhtangov told us about Michael Chekhov, who was able to split his personality in an amazing way; he stunned the other actors in his performance as Caleb, making them cry along with him, not to mention his affect on the audience, and then winked at the people back stage, whispered witty remarks to his partners, fooled around and had a good time on stage. How is this possible? What did it mean? Could it be tolerated, given the need for studio discipline? How did it conform to Vakhtangov's teaching about concentration?

Yury Vavadsky
(Article Published 1959 from Evgeny Vakhtangov, progress publishers, Moscow. Translated from the Russian by Doris Bradbury, Progress Publishers, 1982.)

Re: Eric XIV

Michael Chekhov, the most brilliant and accomplished actor of our time in terms of inner technique, played the title role.

Boris Shushkevich
(Article published 1959 from Evgeny Vakhtangov, Progress Publishers, Moscow. Translated from the Russian by Doris Bradbury, Progress publishers, 1982.)

*An example of what I am referring to was to be seen in **Spellbound**. (The two major performers, Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck were called on to tell the picture's unlikely story so that it might be temporarily acceptable and interesting. But though this task was handsomely fulfilled, there was no moment in their acting that*

was anything more than good imitation.) The picture's on vitality was that of Michael Chekhov. He was not a cog in the machine of the story but a living person.

*Chekhov is one of the few great actors of our time. But he has abdicated from creation. What he does in pictures hardly represents even the surface of his talents. (Playing a Russian repertory, he gave us a series of magnificent stage portrayals in a season that passes practically unnoticed on Broadway in 1935.) His film performances, including the one is **Spellbound**, are not true samples of his art. They are routine performances. But with an entrance, an exit, walking across the room with a glass of milk, lying down, looking, listening, become dramatic. No matter what the scene, we feel ourselves in the presence of human experience. What he does takes on meaning almost apart from the concrete instance of the picture's plot. It is as if he needed no actual role; his acting is a kind of agent of life-focused, pointed, and expressive. He makes the kind of juice of life circulate. Through him we learn once more that we have but to watch any moment of concentrated behavior to be fascinated. The smallest action thoroughly carried out seems to contain a kind of universal essence. This, in little, is the mystery of acting; one might almost say the mystery of life! It illustrates anew that, just as in painting, an apple may equal a Madonna, so in acting has living texture there is more real drama than in the most intricate technical ingenuity.*

All this might be summed up by saying that in Michael Chekhov, whether or not he creates a character, we are still in the presence of a whole man.

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