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## The Fight Master, July 1978, Vol. 1 Issue 2

The Society of American Fight Directors

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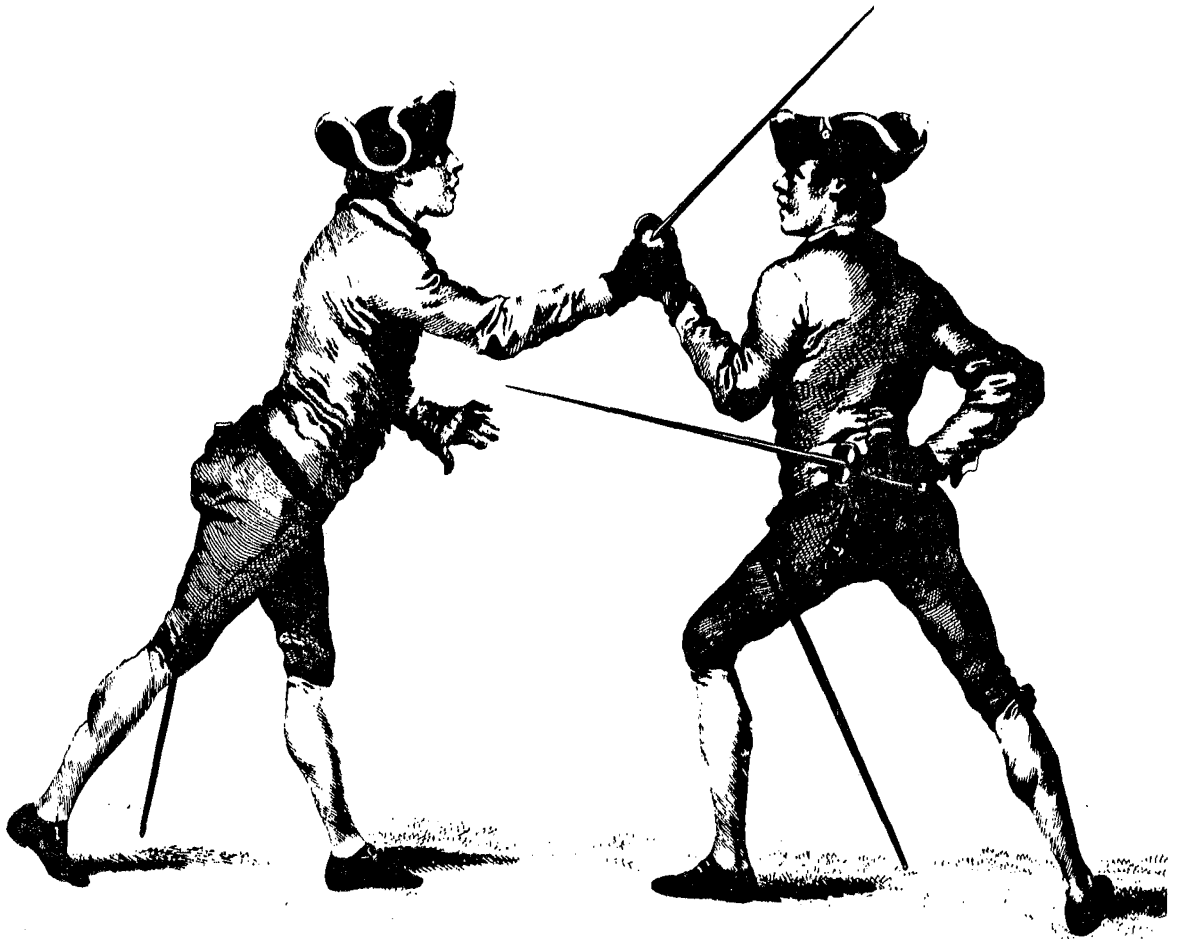
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# the fight master

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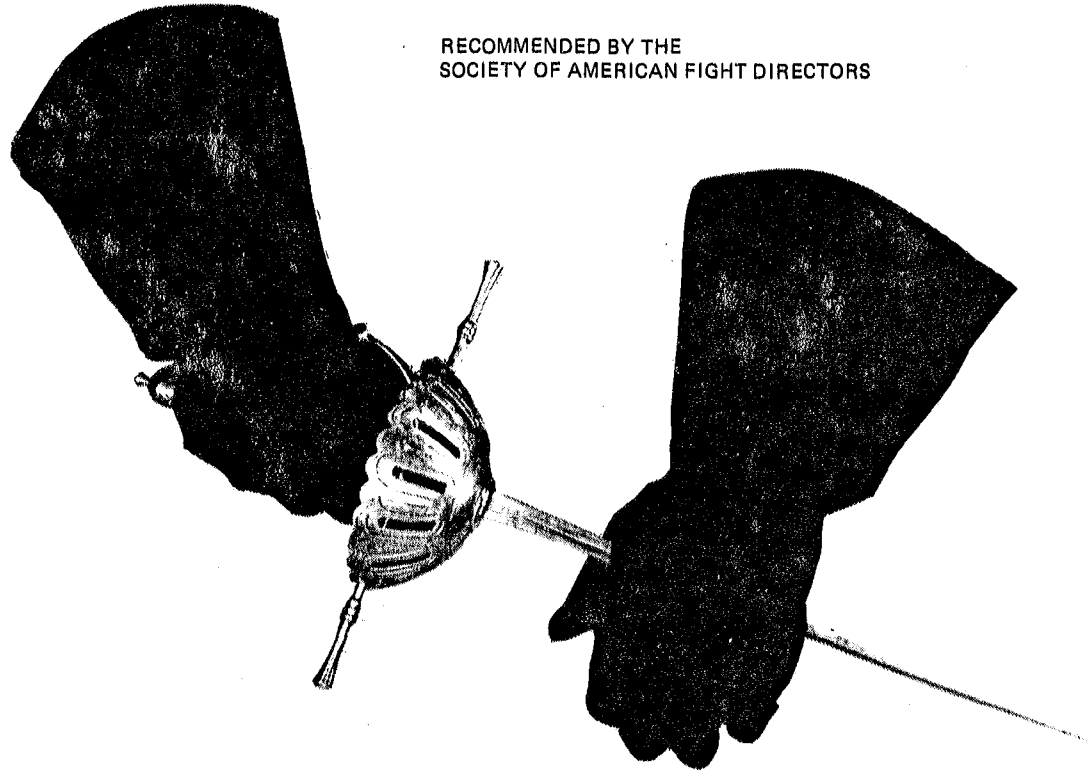
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## THE FIGHT MASTER

The Magazine of the Society of American Fight Directors

No. 2

July 1978

Editor - Mike McGraw

Lay-out - David L. Boushey

Typed and Duplicated by Mike McGraw

\*\*\*\*\*

### Society of American Fight Directors

The second Society of Fight Directors in the world has been incorporated in Seattle, Washington. Its founder is David Boushey, Overseas Affiliate of the Society of British Fight Directors.

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While visiting Los Angeles recently, I had the opportunity to meet and spend an afternoon with Albert Cavens, son of the late Fred Cavens, who was for all practical purposes the premiere Fight Director in Hollywood during its 'golden years'.

With some little difficulty, I managed to locate Al in North Hollywood where he resides with his wife in a beautiful Mediterranean-style home.

We immediately struck up a conversation about "the old days" with emphasis on such stars as Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone, Tyrone Power, Stewart Granger, and many others. Al was quick to point out who was "in", who was "out", and just how competent each was as a swordsman. It was no surprise to find that Al considered Basil Rathbone the best swordsman/actor to cut and thrust his way across the silver screen. Anyone who watches those grand epics of yesteryear can plainly see Mr. Rathbone made many an actor look like a "million bucks". It was a tribute to his ability as an actor and swordsman that he was able to do so with such skill and ease.

As the afternoon wore on (about six beers later), Al decided it was time for my "last" fencing lesson. I was ushered onto the patio where a rapier was thrust into my hand (hilt end, of course). It wasn't long before I realized why the point work in the old films was so dazzling. He emphasized point work a great deal when working with his father and it still plays a big part in his approach to swordplay. I cannot say I completely agree with such a large emphasis on point work as I personally believe more in the authenticity of the period at hand and, if the period was prior to 1700, point work was not as developed as one would have believed while viewing such films as Robin Hood, etc. The broadsword and transitional rapier were very much cutting weapons and many fencing moves developed in the 19th and 20th centuries simply did not exist then; however, one can justify a certain amount of theatrical license and, when seeing the final duel between Flynn and Rathbone in Captain Blood, who can deny the skill that went into the expert choreography?

Al had some criticism for the new breed of Fight Directors, i.e., Hobbs, etc. He felt too much emphasis was put on the rough and tumble aspects of present day choreography. But, as anyone who has studied the history of personal combat would know, the style of fighting for The Three (Four) Musketeers ala Hobbs was very much in keeping with the style of swordplay at that point in time and, in fact, he has been as true as any Fight Director in the business in keeping in touch with the style of fighting for the period involved. Of course, he too has taken some theatrical license, but who among us hasn't? One has to emphasize the authenticity without de-emphasizing theatricality!

I suppose this article could be the catalyst for a good debate regarding the point vs. the cut. If any readers have strong feelings in regard to this eternal argument, your opinions would be graciously accepted.

I might add that in regard to stage fighting, the bulk of the point work used in the old films would have disappeared on a stage. The ability of the camera to zoom in on very exact swordplay involving much finger-play was and is a tremendous asset; however, from a stage thirty feet away, that minute swordplay would not and does not read. The moves for the stage have to be big enough to read to an audience - the same does not apply to film. Where you can get some great face shots and close-ups in filmwork, one has to be aware of the total picture when working the stage, thus filling the space and giving the audience an opportunity to explore the whole event as opposed to presenting a stationary fight between two individuals exercising a great deal of clever finger-play.

Overall, it was a tremendous experience for me to have met and talked with Albert Cavens. He is for all practical purposes retired now, but if the epic swashbuckler ever returns to the screen (in any form), I for one would like to see Al come out of retirement. There are few men in the world who know more about swordplay than Al, especially when it's in his media - the motion picture.

D. L. Boushey

\*FIGHTING FOOTNOTES:STEEL ON CELLULOID

by Lionel Godfrey

In his admirable article in THE FIGHT DIRECTOR No.7 (THE GOLDEN YEARS OF HOLLYWOOD), Jeff Palmer rightly terms Fred Cavens "the unsung hero of Hollywood swordplay". Cavens had an almost intuitive realization that the small, subtle movements of competitive fencing would not come across on the screen and that fights should therefore be truly fights - not professional exhibitions - the whole accent being on the spectacular, the thrilling, the elegant and the graceful. Aided by a variety of directors, he translated these principles into breathtaking action, right up to the later years of his life. Jeff Palmer fails to mention - nor have I ever seen mentioned in print - his work for the television series THE ADVENTURES OF HIRAM HOLLIDAY, twenty-five minute shorts loosely derived from the book by Paul Gallico and starring the late Wally Cox. As the eponymous and bespectacled Holliday, Cox had a number of fights, including several with Cavens himself, who played a miscellany of roles in the series. The small screen, of course, demanded smaller work, but even here, towards the end of a great career, Cavens showed himself inventive and amusing, greatly assisting producer Robert Stillman and director Philip Rapp in the creation of a witty, deft and entertaining series - transmitted, in this country, as children's viewing. The fights Cavens devised for Hiram to wage with his umbrella, to the consternation of his adversaries, never failed to amuse.

The two Cavens, Fred the father and Albert the son, appeared in CYRANO DE BERGERAC (1950), for which Cavens pere staged a thrilling duel in a theater between Cyrano (Jose Ferrer) and Valvert (Albert Cavens), with Cyrano extemporizing a ballade as he fights and at last running Valvert through on the words: "Then, as I end the refrain, thrust home!"

Elsewhere in the same film, the staging is more careless,

notably in a sequence in which Cyrano tackles several ruffians at once, holding the top of a staircase by running from the lefthand flight of steps to the right, lunging lethally with every dash. This is exhilarating stuff, but the camera moves in too close to reveal clearly that not Jose Ferrer but Fred Cavens is at work - his figure much squatter than Ferrer's, a plumed hat pulled down over his face, which is abortively disguised by false mustache and beard. Despite dim lighting and rapid editing, this is an extremely crude piece of doubling.

Much superior is Ralph Faulkner's work in THE SEA HAWK (1940), aided immeasurably by Michael Curtiz's direction and the camera-work of Sol Polito. Jeff Palmer calls Henry Daniell, the picture's superb villain, "lethal, but apparently unathletic" - hence the need for doubling. However, there was more to it than that. Daniell, an incomparable actor, was like James I; he would turn pale at the sight of a drawn sword, and he loathed the whole business of screen-fencing.

THE SEA HAWK's climactic duel is noteworthy in one other way. The Flynn swashbucklers are extensively interrelated and evolve from the pattern established, in however rudimentary a form, by CAPTAIN BLOOD (1935), and thus it is hardly surprising to discover that the composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who added so much lustre to all these films, utilizes again for the Flynn-Daniell clash the same chillingly effective xylophone-motif that he had used two years earlier for the Flynn-Rathbone duel in THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD. Besides other similarities in lighting and the use of shadows, the two fights possess a unity that stems from their both being choreographed - the only accurate word - by Fred Cavens. (Screen fencing as entertainment and spectacle may owe much to music, but it is worth pointing out that Jean Heremans' six-and-a-half minute fight between Mel Ferrer and Stewart Granger in SCARAMOUCHE takes place without one bar of scoring from veteran Victor Young - being orchestrated quite adequately by the gasps and cries of the audience in the theater.)

The deadly encounters in the Errol Flynn movies were so good that they hardly need inventing through slips of the memory,

and the 'very nice duel with Flynn cutting candles in half' in THE PRIVATE LIVES OF ELIZABETH AND ESSEX is, regrettably, not in the picture at all (TRIPP'S GUIDE TO OLD FILMS ON T.V.: THE FIGHT DIRECTOR No. 11). Can Tripp's unconscious have been engaged in wishful thinking? The unfortunate truth is that Errol looks breathtakingly dashing but fights no duels. Instead, he struggles with Maxwell Anderson's leaden lines and an unplayable role. His public was mystified. Not unreasonably, conditioned by his previous excursions in tights, they waited for him to draw his sword and dispose of his rivals at Elizabeth's court. Would that he had done. But this was Art, and the audience ended up the poorer.

Tripp's Guide, also, simultaneously lists and dismisses Olivier's HAMLET without a comment, but the picture merits one for its well-staged climactic fight between Laertes (Terence Morgan) and Hamlet (Olivier) in the film's last sequence. A convincing solution is found to an old problem - posed by the unsatisfactory directions usually printed in the text: 'in scuffling, they exchange rapiers'. (oh, yes? How?) The film HAMLET translates this inadequate instruction by having the Prince of Denmark, already unfairly nicked by Laertes' unbuttoned weapon, disarm his adversary by some brilliant fencing. Laertes' rapier lies on the floor, but when he moves to retrieve it, Hamlet's foot descends on the blade, and Laertes find himself presented, hilt first, with Hamlet's own weapon, which he is forced to take. The bout resumes, and this time it is Laertes who is pricked by the poisoned, unbuttoned rapier, both men dying in the corpse-strewn finale to the tragedy.

Since HAMLET is in no sense a swashbuckler, this ingenious swordplay must be regarded as something of a bonus. On the other hand, Jeff Palmer is right in asserting that the long-awaited duel at the climax of THE PRISONER OF ZENDA (1937) is disappointing, even though Ralph Faulkner had rehearsed Fairbanks Jr. and Colman for weeks. (Faulkner himself played a minor role as Bersonin.) However, when MGM remade the picture in color in 1952, though it was inferior in most

respects, Jean Heremans restaged the sabre-duel - this time between Stewart Granger and James Mason - and provided all the thrills the public expected, their effect enhanced by a brilliant soundtrack that captured not only the clash of steel but also such incidental noises as the crash of a pewter bowl swept from a table during the fight. The duel was arguably the best feature of a somewhat strange venture, directed by Richard Thorpe, that copied John Cromwell's 'thirties-version virtually shot for shot by means of a moviola that was kept on the set throughout the later filming.

In most screen-duels, the interest is usually focused on the men rather than their weapons, but THE IRON MISTRESS (1952), while it is certainly the story, however, fictional, of Jim Bowie, is also an account of the making of his famous knife. Stylistically assured, masterly in its uses of color and music (max Steiner), the film glories in its verbal and visual rhetoric. For the memorable knife vs. sword duel, director Gordon Douglas has the two combatants locked in a darkened attic, the only illumination flashes of lightning that come through the skylight. To Alan Ladd, the heavy suggests that they shall meet in the middle of the room. Ladd, at his terse best, retorts, "We'll meet when we meet."

But perhaps the highlight of THE IRON MISTRESS is an impressive montage sequence depicting the making of the Bowie knife. As Jim Bowie, Ladd calls on a smith and remarks: "I understand that you make a very good cutting edge, that you have a different method of tempering." The smith is at first cautious about his trade secrets, but agrees to make a knife to Bowie's specifications. "I've never seen a blade shaped in proportion like this," says the craftsman. "The heel at the back looks mighty thick. I get three-eighths of an inch here." Bowie replies, "That's to give it strength. Above all, it must have strength. I've seen swords fail, knives fail. I want something that will never fail."

The smith takes up the challenge, having first shown Bowie something that he explains thus: 'Once I saw a fireball pass across the sky - bright as the sun. Then there was a terrific roar, like a hundred cannon. It was the death of a

shooting-star. Later I found this fragment of the meteor. This is steel - pure steel from another world, tougher and harder than anything on this earth. I've tried to match it but, of course, I never can. Yet I think I've come as close as any man."

Since he anticipates a deadly fight, Bowie wants his knife in a mere four days - "a unique knife", as the smith says. "A knife like the world never saw before." But the man agrees to do the near-impossible, and at the height of the melting process, he adds the meteor fragment to the crucible. When he hands over the finished knife to Bowie, he promises, "This steel will hold an edge like none you ever saw." Bowie admits that he never thought such a knife could be, and the smith stresses that there could certainly be no other. "I fused into it a fragment of a star. For better or worse, that knife of yours has a bit of heaven in it - or a bit of hell."

If the historical facts fail to match the poetry of THE IRON MISTRESS, so much the worse for the facts. They don't make them like that any more.

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#### NEXT ISSUE:

The Society intends to propose the inclusion into The Society of American Fight Directors of a testing system whereby students can obtain certification as trained combatants. The students who pass the necessary qualifications will receive a certificate recognizing their achievements. The students will be trained by their prospective teachers and will be judged by full members of the Society.

The Society would especially like to hear from the teachers of combat in the various institutions of higher education. There are a number of teachers in the Society and it would be of great value to the officers of the Society as to how you feel about such certification and how you feel it could best be realized as an important part of our overall efforts as a viable force in this area of theater and cinema.

## FENCING CLASS FORMATIONS

by Richard J. Gradkowski

The classical arrangement for the teaching of fencing is the individual pupil-fencing master unit. This method is undoubtedly the best for the intensive development of the individual fencer. The close rapport necessary for the communication of complex ideas, and the adaptation of theory to the particular demands of a pupil are best accomplished by the use of this highly individualistic "tutorial" system. However, the fencing master often finds himself in situations where this method is not practical. If he has a sizable class, his individual lessons must be short to be equally distributed, and during the time taken up by these lessons the motivation of the other students may lag. They may feel that the instructor has lost interest in them. Few things are more discouraging than seeing a group of bored or uninvolved pupils sitting around while the fencing master is occupied by giving an individual lesson.

To overcome this problem, and to keep the entire class involved and active, the following suggested series of group formations can be used. The use of these formations is indicated in large class situations, training camps, team practice, and in clinics and demonstrations whenever one instructor has to handle a large group. The rationale for using a particular formation is varied. Certain formations are uniquely suited for certain functions and unsuited for other functions. Such factors as available floor space, size of group, open lines of vision, exercise space requirements, and types of actions executed, must all be considered. Sometimes, merely changing a formation will add psychological stimulus to the dull routine of hard training.

**MASS FORMATION** (fig. 1) is the most efficient in terms of utilization of limited space with large groups. It is well suited for the giving of calisthenics and general conditioning work such as running in place, etc. Problems of supervision may arise in that the instructor cannot reach all of the participants and, in this case, an assistant



FIG. 1

circulating among the formation may help. The imperfect line of vision of the rear ranks can be avoided by staggering the ranks or by having the instructor on an elevated platform. As in all classwork, the instructor should be sure that he can be clearly heard and seen by the pupils.

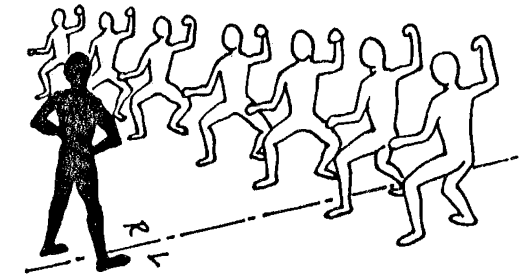


FIG. 2

**LINE FORMATION** (fig. 2) is uniquely suited for footwork exercises since complex footwork patterns can be executed without fear of collision and because each student can observe the instructor directly with a visual check on either side. The fencing master should place all left-handed students on the right end of the line and place himself on the spot bisecting the left-handed and right-handed segments of the line. In this manner all pupils can easily observe the instructor without uncomfortable craning of their necks.

**CIRCLE FORMATION** (fig. 3) is best suited for intermediate size groups not exceeding 10-12 pupils. It can be used for the introductory phase of learning a new skill and for the brief period associated with implanting a new concept. As an example; The fencing master teaches the group the disengage riposte from a parry four. He then has each individual pupil do the action against him, while he remains in the center of the circle rotating from pupil to pupil. This procedure gives each pupil a chance to do the action once or twice and to receive correction. The others, being in close proximity and knowing that their turn will soon come, observe intently and can even pick up pointers from each other's mistakes.



FIG. 3

**HALF-CIRCLE FORMATION** (fig. 4) is suited for conferences, demonstrations, and discussions, as all pupils can get a close look, while still leaving room for the fencing master and an assistant to maneuver. Pupils may sit down on the floor in this formation without getting lost in the back of a group.

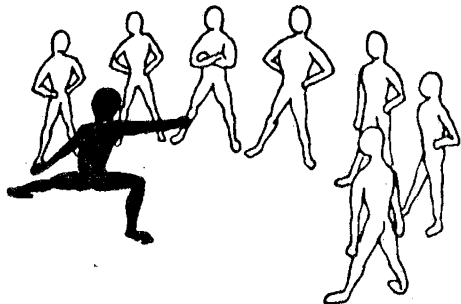


FIG. 4

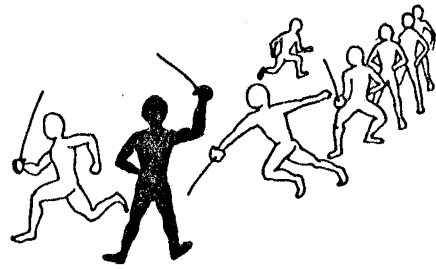


FIG. 5

**RAILROAD TRAIN FORMATION** (fig. 5) consists of a constantly moving line of pupils acting in sequence with the fencing master and, upon completion of their action, returning to the end of the line. This formation is well suited to repetitious drill of one action without the tiring intensity with which would be invoked by the concentrated master-pupil lesson. Because of its rotating nature, everyone is kept busy and in motion preparing, executing their action, or coming back into line. As they go around the pupils have a chance to review and correct their errors. This formation is especially well suited for sabre and epee attacks done with the fleche.

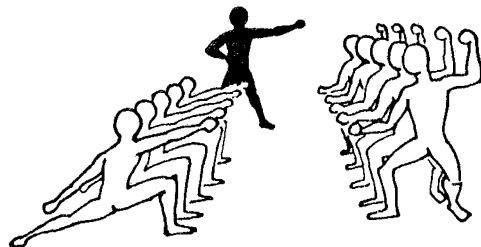
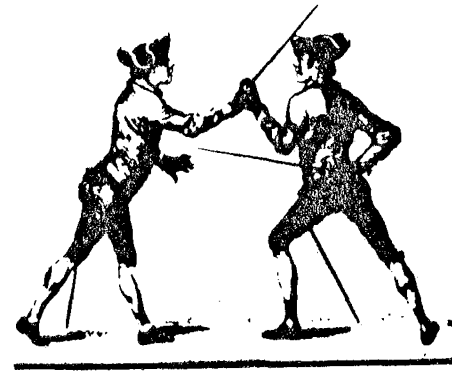


FIG. 6

**DOUBLE-LINE FORMATION** (fig. 6) is useful for the practicing of prearranged reciprocal exercises. Specific attacks and defenses can be executed by command or freely by the pairs of fencers in two facing lines. The coach can circulate giving correction and advice. One well known women's coach uses the designation "Musketiers" and "Cavaliers" for distinguishing the lines.

(Continued Next Page)

Some very elaborate actions, going as far as second intention, can be practiced in this way. The pupils can take turns acting as the attackers and defenders, thus getting a well rounded comprehension of an action. An important pedagogical point in this method is that the pupils are somewhat on their own, working with each other instead of the coach, and thus make many adjustments to each others' individual tempo and other idiosyncracies.



In conclusion it should be emphasized that while generally a particular formation is best suited for a particular need, many of these formations can be used interchangeably (especially with moderate sized groups). The effectiveness of many of these formations can be increased by the use of assistant coaches out on the floor. Those instructors who are inexperienced or unfamiliar with the use of such class formations should not hesitate to try them out. In teaching fencing to large groups they will find that the sense of activity and participation engendered in their students will be well worth the little extra trouble.



TO SLAP OR NOT TO SLAP-  
THAT ISN'T ALWAYS THE QUESTION

by Joseph Martinez

There has long been a controversy raging between those who demand that to be theatrically effective one should always make contact when performing a stage slap versus the advocates of the non-contact slapping illusions. I confess I am in the non-contact camp. Of course, there are instances when a contact slap seems unavoidable - i.e., when a director adamantly insists on the actual slap taking place (usually out of ignorance concerning the very credible alternatives) or, for example, when the performers seem to require the sensory experience in rehearsal. However, to slap or not to slap isn't always the most important issue, but rather how should the contact slap be performed and, more specifically, where should impact occur?

In my opinion, a dangerous example of misinformation has come out in print concerning the contact slap in Mr. Albert M. Katz's book, STAGE VIOLENCE - TECHNIQUES OF OFFENSE, DEFENSE AND SAFETY. Mr. Katz instructs the novice to strike the victim with a cupped palm on the side of the neck below the jawline. With deference to Mr. Katz's experience and standing in the Society, I believe this information to be very dangerous and completely in error from the standpoint of safety - not to mention that his version looks like a neck slap, not a face slap. (I saw Mr. Katz perform his slap at the A.T.A Convention in Chicago.)

Let's look at the problem from an anatomical viewpoint. The neck is not specifically designed by nature to be a shock absorber, but is indeed a rather fragile, albeit flexible, link between the crucial functionings of the brain and the rest of the body. In fact, because of its vulnerability, the neck is a favorite target for many forms of hand-to-hand combat in the Martial Arts! To begin with, the trachea is all too exposed and the cervical vertebrae are relatively susceptible to dislocation. Also, the neck region is a labyrinth of arteries, veins, nerve fibers, and a concentrated seat for an extensive Lymphatic System.

\* "The Lymphatics are exceedingly delicate vessels, the coats of which are so transparent that the fluid they contain is readily seen through them."

TWO VIEWS OF THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM  
SUPERFICIAL DEEP



You can readily see how exposed the Lymphatics are to a blow in the neck region. I trust I've made my point against slapping the neck. But where to slap?

If a contact slap must be done, I maintain it can be performed safely on the cheek. The two most important aspects of slapping the cheek are:

1) Accuracy of placement

The index finger of the hand, the thumb out of the way, should not extend above the cheek bone, or the little finger below the jawline; and, of course, the corner of the mouth and ear are avoided. The hand, not the arm, is stiff so as to make an effective slapping sound, but only the fingers of the hand, not the palm, make contact! (And please remind the actors to pare their nails before they begin to practice.)

2) Minimizing the force

We want an effective sound of impact with a minimum of force. Therefore the arm should be loose and relaxed - always under control, but the hand should be stiff for accuracy. The wrist remains supple, but don't snap the wrist as you slap, as this increases velocity; velocity plus mass equals force!

The impact on the face occurs at a given point on an arc or ellipse. In other words, as the face is struck the attacker immediately pulls the hand back toward himself in a sweeping arc, thus helping to not only create the illusion of the follow through, but also thereby altering the lines of force. The force of the slap is going to and away from the face, not to and through the face as in the lines of force in a normal slap.

The victim must keep the neck muscles loose and supple so as to "give" with the slap. But the muscles of the jaw should remain fairly taut, for muscle tension is a natural safeguard in maintaining joint integrity during impact. There is a hazard here if the victim anticipates the slap by turning the head too soon and dangerously moving the ear into the path of the slap.

Moving the head in anticipation of the slap or flinching connotes distrust and fear of the unknown pain. Often the attacker will not know kinesthetically what amount of force to use, thus the attacker becomes frightened of accidentally hurting the victim. I've found that if the attacker slaps himself on his own cheek with the force he's about to use on the victim, he immediately has a point of reference which rarely fails to make both parties more comfortable. I have the attacker slap himself first each and every time the partners rehearse the slapping technique. And sometimes to break the ice, I'll have the victim also slap himself to demonstrate that it really doesn't hurt that much.

Returning to the option - to slap or not to slap - I believe it is rarely necessary to do an actual slap in performance. The non-contact slapping illusions can be very effective, even in the round. If there's space next issue, I'll outline some of the more common slapping illusions I use. Or, perhaps other members will share their techniques.

## RICHARD III FIGHT SEQUENCE

The following is a fight sequence choreographed by David L. Boushey for Oregon Shakespeare Festival's production of Richard III (1978). This is Boushey's own particular system for putting a fight down on paper. It is a short-hand system that basically divides the sheet into two halves - one character on one side, the other character(s) occupying the other side. The arrow indicates who is attacking whom.

NOTE: This fight is not meant for reproduction. It is a guideline to help a director put his fight on paper before he starts working with the actors in a given production.

<u>RICHARD</u>	----->	<u>RICHMOND</u>
Cut vert. to head	----->	Parry overhead (quinte)
Spin and parry left	<-----	Cut to left flank
Butt hilt against blade -		
Turn & cut to left hip	----->	Parry prime
Parry overhead	<-----	Mollinello to head
Parry sword left	<-----	Mollinello to left flank
Parry sword rt.	<-----	Cut hori. to rt. flank
		Both slide in
		Corp-a-corp
		Both push off
Parry sword left		
Circle 180°	<-----	Cut to left shoulder
Parry sword rt.	<-----	Cut to rt. shoulder
Parry sword down left	<-----	Cut to left knee
Cut to rt. thigh	----->	Parry sword rt.
Stagger back	<-----	Turn hand & throw off
Start to leave (Others hold him back) Pause -		
Cut diag. from left to rt.	----->	Duck diag.
Cut diag. from rt to lft.	----->	Duck diag.
Cut vert. to head	----->	Parry both hands
Push chest w/foot	----->	Fall down

## FIGHT SEQUENCE (Cont.)

<u>RICHARD</u>	<u>RICHMOND</u>
Cut to head	-----> Roll over
Turn & cut to head	-----> Parry both hands
Stagger back	←----- Push stom. w/foot (Richm. scramble to feet - circle 180°)
Duck	←----- Cut hori. across head
Parry sword left	←----- Cut hori. to left should.
Turn & elbow to stom.	-----> Bend over
Attmpt. to pommel head	-----> Catch hand
Catch hand	←----- Attmpt. to pommel side
Knee to stom.	Corp-a-corp -----> Bend over
Swing hilt across head	-----> Duck
Scream!	←----- Pommel to rt. side
Try to escape - (Others hold him back)- Sit on bench (rt.)	←----- Approach
Pull dagger & slash stom	-----> Jump back
Parry both weapons	←----- Cut to head vert.
Step up & push off -	
Flip sword -	-----> Parry overhead
Cut to head	-----> Jump back
Slash w/dagger	←----- Cut to head
Turn 360° & parry both	
Pull dagger & thrust to left side	-----> Catch hand
Drop dagger	Corp-a-corp ←----- Knee dagger from hand Force sword to floor
Parry overhead	←----- Spin & cut to head
Cut to rt. side	-----> Parry & spin
Parry sword rt.	←----- Cut to rt. flank
Parry overhead	←----- Cut vert. to head
Sweep blade down -	
Cut across head	-----> Duck
Cut across stom.	-----> Jump back
Cut diag. to rt. should.	
Circle 180°	-----> Parry rt. diag.

## FIGHT SEQUENCE (Cont.)

<u>RICHARD</u>	<u>RICHMOND</u>
Cut diag. to left should.	-----> Parry left diag.
Cut across stom.	-----> Jump back - Fall to bench
Thrust by pillar	-----> Avoid to rt.
Stagger back	←----- Push off w/foot
Parry diag. left	←----- Cut to left should. diag.
Parry diag. rt.	←----- Cut to rt. should. diag.
Parry diag. left	←----- Cut to left should. diag.
Sweep down -	
Cut to rt. should. diag.	-----> Parry rt.
Cut to rt. knee	-----> Parry down rt.
Parry overhead (quinte)	←----- Mollinello to head
Parry sword left	←----- Mollinello to left flank
Spin & cut across head	-----> Duck
Hit	←----- Slash stom.
Circle the stage -	
End up stage left -	
Approach Richm. & drop to knees -	-----> Richm. has sword extended
Grab blade -	
Pull towards body -	←----- Thrust home!
Die!	

## FIREARMS PRIMER

by Ron Martell, S.A.F.D.

The use of handguns, rifles, shotguns and other explosive devices in stage productions is on the rise. Proper use, maintenance and safety practices regarding firearms is essential, but the unfortunate fact remains that few Fight Directors are trained in the use of these weapons.

This little tract may be of some interest to those of you who may be confronted with the need for firepower on stage.

HANDGUNS

By far the most prolific theatrical firearm is the handgun. It is portable, relatively simple to obtain and maintain, and of a weight and size acceptable to most actors. Handguns can be categorized into two groups.

1) The 'prop' weapon: This is a pistol designed to fire only blanks and cannot be used for other purposes, such as a starter's pistol. A typical 'prop' handgun is a .22 calibre revolver of 5 or 6 shots. Some fire directly ahead, as does a regular pistol, but with a protective bar built into the barrel. Another type has a solid barrel with the explosive charge issuing out the side of the weapon at right angles to the barrel. Both use a crimp-type .22 blank of a very small charge. The side-firing type is the safest at short range, since the blank fires away from the "victim", thus assuring protection from powder burns. Its main drawback is that it requires much attention to blocking, since both audience and cast may be in the path of the charge, issuing from the side of the weapon. Some of the side-types issue out from both right and left, some only from the right. The front-firing type eliminates this problem, of course, but is less useful at close range due to its forward powder throw of at least two to three feet.

2) The 'live' weapon: This is an actual weapon with the capability of firing live ammunition and lacking any protective devices whatsoever. In general, .22 and .32 calibres are used, since factory-made blank ammunition is available only in these calibres. The main advantage of a

live weapon is a wider range of pistol types. For example, Ruger puts out an excellent Colt-type .45 six-shooter replica, but in .22 calibre. In addition, more leeway is possible in the size and subsequent sound and fury of the charge - varying from the soft, almost cap-like pop of a .22 crimp to a superloud .32 black powder charge with a wide range in between. When using the 'prop' weapon, one must generally be content with the .22 crimp only.

The obvious disadvantage is the lack of safety devices. The throw from the Ruger .22 mentioned above is four to six feet at minimum. The throw from a .32 is even further.

In some cases, usually in motion picture work, a larger calibre revolver or semi-automatic is absolutely essential. In these cases the blanks must be prepared by pulling the slugs from live ammunition and repacking the shell with a reduced charge. (Note: This last step should, of course, be undertaken only by a qualified specialist.)

In all cases involving the 'live' weapon, one faces the problem of staging the throw safely - that shower of sparks, powder and wadding which presents a potential for injury and fire.

A further problem with the 'live' weapon is the difficulty to obtain such in some states due to handgun control legislation. Most of these states do allow handguns for theatrical purposes, but many require that the owner of a regular handgun permit be present at all times when the weapon is in use. Many stage managers carry such permits for exactly that purpose, and thankfully so, for the red tape of acquiring a handgun permit can drag out to six months or more. Fortunately, these laws do not apply to starter's pistols and other 'prop' firearms.

RIFLES & SHOTGUNS

The long guns are a rarity in stage productions. They are awkward to handle and the shock effect of their discharge can scare audiences right out of their seats, let alone the play. The effect of even a .22 blank in an enclosed space is startling enough and the use of a shotgun or large bore rifle can be counterproductive.

Here again, a .22 rifle mockup can serve for many of the larger calibres.

Firearms companies do not produce shotgun blanks or large calibre rifle blanks so the problem of repacking your own arises, but with added concerns: a shotgun blast is almost too much for a stage production due, not only to its force, but its throw and pattern, the conical expanding flight of the charge once it leaves the barrel. If a shotgun is absolutely essential, cut the charge down to a bare minimum and make sure a full or adjustable choke gun is used so that the pattern can be focused to the narrowest area possible.

Many types of semi-automatic or lever action rifles, such as a 30/30 carbine, cannot use blanks at all except in single shot situations.

Automatic weapons have yet to find their way into the theater as of this issue.

NEXT ISSUE: Other explosive devices and theatrical firearms recommendations.



\* THEORY OF THE STAGE FIGHT -

FIGHTING IN CHARACTER

by Fight Director

I once heard a television Fight Director say that he had worked out an excellent unarmed combat routine which later had to be abandoned because the character he was choreographing for would not be skilled enough to fight in that way. I have also heard John Barton criticize what he called "generalized fighting" as opposed to the particular moves that the characters would make in that particular situation. He added that what he wanted of a fight was the same thing he wanted of a play - "to tell me something, something about the characters involved".

This brings us to the very heart of good fight directing, and the most difficult part of a Fight Director's skill - to create moves that are "in character" for the persons and situation involved. It is not very hard, with application, to accumulate a repertoire of moves that vary from the simple to the complicated. And to assemble a fight on machine-made principles may be superficially attractive, if the choreography is logical and "flashy". But this does not usually advance the dramatic structure of the play by keeping to the basic characters of the protagonists and the stage in the plot they have reached when the fight takes place.

If you teach students, you are teaching basic moves, plus, probably, the combination of moves with dialogue. Therefore, a "teaching fight" is a separate entity to professional choreography. Your students are younger, more adaptable, fitter and less careful of their physical safety than the actors you will encounter professionally. But they are also less skilled in acting and in the knowledge of "character" than an experienced professional, and there is much more time when you are teaching, usually, than in the rush of production. So the teaching fight and the professional fight are two quite different things.

But first let us clear away a misconception. Most fights in films, especially in films of the old-fashioned kind, are

not usually based on character at all. Character is much more lightly sketched in films than in plays or television, and you are free to be as flashy as you like with the help of doubles and mechanical aids. All that most film fights tell us is that villain meets hero, villain almost kills hero, hero kills villain. But in the theater character comes first. "The characters make the play" Terence Rattigan once wrote in a memorable article. This is true of all serious plays and even in farces and thrillers any action that is really "out of character" will ruin the play.

So specialists, such as choreographers or Fight Directors who are called in on specific productions must also work within the framework of character as established by the author, actors and play director. The Fight Director may be described as an auteur d'action, but he should not be allowed to work in isolation without reference to the rest of the production. This is why people without theater experience are rarely successful Fight Directors, except perhaps by accident. A Fight Master needs the hard-core grind behind him of acting, play directing, or writing, plus a very strong sense of theater, and to know in his bones what is right and what is wrong theatrically.

I once saw two very able but inexperienced young actors develop a fight sequence on their own which included two spectacular disarms. But these moves, effective in themselves, were completely wrong for the fight they were doing in the situation they were in and were subsequently cut by the play director and the Fight Director. A Fight Director may know every move in the world, but unless he can create something for particular characters that is "characteristic" of them in the situation in which they are placed, he will have failed in his fight.

Here the great difficulty arises. A dramatist invents his lines that reveal character. But it is practically impossible to invent fighting strokes, armed or unarmed, as individual as the dialogue the actors speak. So one must admit straight away that really individual moves are virtually impossible. Take a head cut, for example. Is Tybalt more likely to make one than Mercutio? If so, why?

The temptation to impose moves on your actors is very

strong, when you begin your career. Sometimes, owing to the shortness of rehearsal time and the inexperience of the cast in combat, you are going to have to do it later anyway, usually against your will. Assuming that this is the situation in a given production, what emerges in the end is very much governed by the acting ability available. If the moves are reasonable, and an actor is competent in them, and if he is really good (and this means, in this instance, that he has a strong personality) he will make those moves so much part of his acting performance that they seem "in character", owing to the way he performs them.

But in a more hopeful situation when the Fight Director has time to think, he must have two considerations in mind: how to invent characteristic moves and how to work with the actors to obtain more of these moves during rehearsal. For example, the moves described mockingly by Mercutio as typical of Tybalt's style are specified:

1. The one two and the third in his bosom.
2. The Punto Riverse.
3. The immortal Passado.
4. The Hai.

They give us a very definite indication of Tybalt's fighting, so perhaps he can be permitted to make them during his fights. On the other hand he need not use any of them. But Mercutio's invitation to Tybalt to begin the fight with his pasado suggests that Tybalt would be a fool to attempt any such thing. A pasado consisted of a feint over the arm and a thrust under the arm. If he accepts Mercutio's suggestion, Tybalt's initial feint would be ignored and the actual attack parried, with a swift counter-attack from Mercutio to follow. Alternatively, Mercutio may hit him as he feints. Another possibility is that Tybalt could make a two feint attack, over, under and attack over. But could not Tybalt conceivably oblige Mercutio with his pasado, performed as mockingly as Mercutio made his suggestion, which could give

you an original opening to the fight?

These are specifics. "Romeo and Juliet" is a famous fighting play, and the overall dramatic structure of each fight is fairly well laid down by the author. But even here exactly to decide which strokes are characteristic of those concerned can be a subject of endless debate. Perhaps the best way to tackle the question, if you have time, and the actors have a good grasp of character plus some stage fighting techniques, is to go into rehearsal with no moves planned at all and say to the actors, "What would you do first?" "Now what would you do?" "What does your actor's instinct tell you to do?"

An actor's instinct is the most valuable ally in the world for a Fight Director. It is worth a hundred cuts to head and half the well-stocked repertoire of fight moves. If you know how to appeal to that instinct and the actors are good and competent in performing your moves, all you need to do is translate what they feel is right for their characters into actual strokes and footwork. Assembling the fight slowly on this basis, you can afterwards structure it according to your own experience - in the sense that your own instinct may tell you that you need a couple of quick exchanges here and an extended sequence there, and so forth.

I would suggest that the above plan is the best way to get the best fight, assuming that time and the actor's skills are on your side. Then the fight will arise out of "Character" and character alone.

But in assessing the quality of the end-product another consideration arises. One is always conscious of the fact that a dazzling duel or punch-up with every character fighting skillfully will appeal to the audience. But is it true to the play? Although our ancestors learned the fighting arts for use in real combat, it is surely fantasy to suggest that they were all equally skillful at them. Just as some people nowadays never make progress at fencing or boxing, while others excell, no doubt the ancients were equally varied in their attainments. Some of them must have been very poor swordsmen, and even in those days

there must have been a proportion of professional lunatics just as there is today.

There is scope for character here - someone who cannot fight well or someone who can hardly fight at all, or someone who fights like a madman. I once heard of a man who had a very short time to practice for a duel, so the Master who taught him concentrated on imparting only one attacking stroke. A cut to head. Could one make use of this in a stage fight? Would it be monotonous, dramatically, if one did? It would certainly be realistic, given the right circumstances and, most important of all, the right character. In this case the sole use of one cut would be very characteristic.

In some plays you have a character's fighting method more or less given to you at the start. Richard III is a hunch-back, the degree of his deformity varying from production to production. While the Fight Directory may be hampered by Richard's inability in certain directions, he is helped by a clearly established contrast of the scuttling, spidery crab-movements of Richard and those of the lusty normal straight-backed Richmond.

There are also extreme cases in plays in which one person is supposed to know nothing of combat at all. This is the most difficult kind of light to choreograph technically. The actor must forget his own combat skills, if he has any, and rely on blind aggressive and defensive instinct. The Fight Director will probably have trouble creating a dramatic combat and keeping it safe, but the main work of "character" is done for him, in the sense that there is already a great contrast between how one character fights and the other.

It is in the area where both protagaonists are assumed to be skillful that the difficulty arises in its most acute form. How are you to differentiate between the two characters choreographically? But if you fail, sometimes the actors will be good enough for the "character" to emerge from their different performances of what you set.

There is no pat answer to the question of character in fighting. But it must be ever in the mind of the Fight

Director, and if he relies on his actor's grasp of character and is lucky enough to be working within the framework of a production by a sympathetic and inventive director, he may still come up with a good fight.

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\* Reprinted from THE FIGHT DIRECTOR, the magazine of the Society of British Fight Directors, by permission of the Editor.

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#### A FILM REVIEW

#### - STAR WARS -

I, like millions of others, was very impressed with this space fantasy. The special effects were nothing short of brilliant. One of the most clever ideas in this category was the use of laser swords in the confrontation between Darth Vader and Ben Kenobi. There were so many wonderful aspects to the film, including music and design, that one had to ponder why the climactic fight between the two "forces" was so mediocre.

I must say that I was looking forward to a real swashbuckler of a fight due to a tremendous media build-up prior to my viewing the film. All this added to my disappointment in this small but vital segment of the film. Anyone with a reasonable imagination could have made the laser fight a real gem. If the athletic prowess of the actors was a burden, doubles could easily have been introduced. The fact that Alec Guinness is starting to get on a bit was no excuse for letting this brilliant innovation elude the Fight Director's grasp. Just the pure execution of basic swordplay was lacking. A little more inventive body movement on the part of both actors would have added so much. I am well aware that the laser swords were not of real substance, that you could not bang them together, but at the same time, more innovative movement could have been added to the fight. Fortunately, the sound effects department came to the rescue and made the fight seem a lot more interesting than it really was. There were no cuts over the head, no corps-a-corps to speak of, and certainly no blade-work.

I, for one, had a marvelous time watching the film because of its overall accomplishments. It was a treat to go to a cinema and just sit back and enjoy a good old-fashioned spectacle with lots of romanticism. No difficult plots, no hidden messages, no downers telling you what a lousy world we live in; just a wonderful space-age swashbuckler like the days of old. The only change being the evolution of space ships replacing the now extinct pirate ship.

I feel the primary problem was the lack of ability on the part of the Fight Director. Peter Diamond choreographed the fight scene and it was proved once more that stunt men don't necessarily make Fight Directors. If William Hobbs had directed the fight scene, we would have seen a very good piece of choreography, but unfortunately, some producers still don't know the difference between a stuntman and a professional fight choreographer and, until they come to realize the difference, many fight sequences in cinema will continue to be as dreary as the one in Star Wars.

D.L. Boushey

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#### A GOOD TRAINING WEAPON FOR SWORDPLAY

I was asked by one of my colleagues and a member of the Society to detail what I consider the best weapon for use in preparing students for the art of swordplay for the stage.

I personally prefer the epee to any other modern fencing weapon when it comes down to the necessary skills to be acquired by would-be actors and actresses. My strong leaning toward the epee stems from the fact that it is a durable weapon that can be used as a thrusting or cutting stage weapon. I find modern foils absolutely useless in stage fighting! My reason being that they bend too easily, often buggy-whipping when put to the test; especially when delivering a vertical cut to the head. A decent parry is often not enough to avoid being the recipient of a generous welt on your pate. The reason being, the foils bend so easily that it becomes a hazard rather than a safe reliable weapon if only meant to be used in the rehearsal process. Also, they are far too light to resemble anything close to a rapier or small sword. If I have no other choice but the foil when conducting a fight workshop, I will use them with the greatest reluctance.



As for the sabre, it is a cutting weapon and not really meant as a good thrusting weapon. Here again, the blade is so light it has a tendency to bend just when you don't want it to. It certainly doesn't fit into any period but a modern piece. The guard is very hard to disguise or try to make 'period'.

What I prefer is the Italian epee. It has the quillon that allows the actor to secure his grip, thus minimizing the possibility of the sword ending up in the fifth row. I suggest a straight grip which can be handled by either right-handers or left-handers. The French grip is fine for competitive fencing, but when it comes to the stage, the Italian grip with the bar going across the cup is an excellent fighting weapon. Also, the epee is much easier to dress-up like a period weapon. The Armoury in San Francisco handles a very nice rapier which has the hilt of a rapier but the cup and blade of a modern epee. It is a little less expensive than their standard period rapier.

If you are in the market for a good durable broadsword, there is only one place at the moment to get one and that is through the Society and its swordsmith, Mr. Mark Haney. He is located in Sacramento, California and has all the skills to build a good broadsword for the stage.

Weapons are always a problem for the professional fight choreographer or the teacher of stage combat. Budgets are usually at a minimum and one cannot afford to be wasting money on weapons that break or that do not suit the play.

The epee is your best bet when considering a cutting and thrusting weapon for the stage. If you do break a blade, it can be easily replaced. You will find in the long run that the epee will long outlast either the foil or sabre. As I stated, this is my preference and I attribute it to many a frustrating hour trying to come up with a good fighting weapon for performance or training.

D.L.Boushey

BOOK LIST ON STAGE FIGHTING

- \* Techniques of the Stage Fight  
by William Hobbs  
Published in London by Studio Vista Limited - 1967

- 
- The History and Art of Personal Combat  
by Arthur Wise  
Published in London by Hugh Evelyn Limited - 1971

- 
- The Duel  
by Robert Baldrick  
Published by The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited  
- 1970

- 
- Schools and Masters of Fence  
by Egerton Castle  
Published by Lionel Leventhal Limited -1969

- 
- Weapons In The Theatre  
by Arthur Wise  
Published by Longmans, Green and Co. Limited  
- 1968

- 
- The Book of the Sword  
by Sir Richard Burton  
Published by E.P. Publishing Limited - 1972

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\* William Hobbs will have his new, updated book on stage fighting on the market within the next two months.

## BOOK LIST (Cont.)

Medieval Warfare  
by Geoffrey Hindley  
Published by Wayland Publishers Limited - 1971

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Sword and Masque  
by Julius Palffy - Alpar  
Published by F.A. Davis Company - 1967

---

The Sword and the Centuries  
by Alfred Hutton  
Published by Charles E. Tuttle Company - 1973

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The Face of Battle  
by John Keegan  
Published by Viking Press - 1976

---

Stunting In The Cinema  
by Arthur Wise  
Derek Ware  
Published by St. Martin's Press - 1973

---

Stage Swordplay  
by Henry Marshall  
Published by Marymount College, New York - 1978

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SOCIETY NEWS

ERIC BOOTH (Affiliate) is playing Hamlet at the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival. He co-directed the fights for that production.

DAVID L. BOUSHEY has recently finished choreographing the fights for Othello and Twelfth Night for the Utah Shakespeare Festival. He is presently conducting a workshop for the Renaissance Workshop affiliated with the Ashland Shakespeare Festival. He will be doing the operas Carmen, Macbeth, and Don Giovanni for the Seattle Opera this fall.

PADDY CREAN (Honorary) choreographed the fights for Macbeth at the Stratford Ontario Shakespeare Festival.

ERIK FREDRICKSEN has just finished choreographing the fights for Macbeth at The Long Wharf Theater.

BYRON JENNINGS is playing Leontes in The Winters Tale at the Pacific Conservatory of Performing Arts-Santa Maria, Ca.

RON MARTELL has recently completed an apprenticeship with a blacksmith in Oregon. He now intends to make his own weapons for the stage and eventually set up a business in the building of theatrical weapons. He will continue to choreograph professionally as well. His most recent offering being Richard III at The Virginia Museum Theatre.

PETER MOORE (Affiliate) is acting at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. He intends to go back to Minneapolis at the end of summer where he will start his own stage fight/fencing school.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Society of American Fight Directors was founded in May 1977. Its aims are to promote the art of fight choreography in such a manner that the Fight Director will be accepted as an integral part of the theater and cinema industry. Promoting the aesthetics of well-conceived fight choreography as an integral part of the total production is another aim of the society.

Full members are professional Fight Directors.

Affiliate members are fencing masters in drama schools, overseas members, or Fight Directors of limited experience.

Friends are people interested in stage fighting but who are not necessarily connected with professional fight directing.

Student members are drama students who aspire to become Fight Directors.

Society Rules

Members are reminded that only full members may use the Society's name to secure employment, however; affiliate and student members may use their status in any capacity other than securing employment.

Inquiries about membership and editorial articles should be mailed to the Society's permanent address:

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