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The Society of American Fight Directors

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MOULINET: An Action Quarterly



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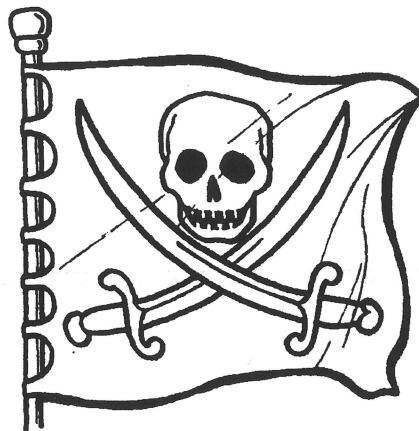
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MOULINET: An Action Quarterly

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WE WANT YOUR STORIES! Our goal is to bring you news, information and anecdotes on the topic of stage combat. We can't do it without your contributions, so tell us what you want to know or what you think we should know. Got some fighting words? Send them to *Moulinet: An Action Quarterly*.

Articles, interviews, features – 300-1000 words. Reviews – 100-300 words.

Mail all submissions to MOULINET, P.O. Box 392, La Grange, Illinois 60525 or e-mail to fightingwords@hotmail.com (include ground-mail address and/or telephone number, please)

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ADVERTISEMENTS – \$5 for 1-25 words,
\$10 for 26-50 words. (Boxes, graphics, etc.,
\$10 with camera-ready copy.)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MARY SHEN BARNIDGE is a freelance writer and theatre critic for the *Chicago Reader* and *Windy City Times*. She is a member of the American Theatre Critics Association, Poets & Writers, Inc. and a Friend in the Society Of American Fight Directors.

BEBE SWERDLOW is a retired ornithologist who spends his time seeing storefront theatre and browsing in used bookstores. He is also a playwright and sometime actor.

CALL TO ARMS

Richard Gilbert and David Gregory, **R & D Choreography**, will conduct a series of "Violence Design" workshops on three successive Saturdays—February 21, 28 and March 6—at The Fight Shop, 648 West Randolph Street. For information and registration, phone (847) 333-1494 or e-mail info@fightshop.org.

New York's **Lady Cavaliers** will offer two "hands-on" workshops on 22 February, in conjunction with the Women-At-Arms play festival in Hollywood, California. For information on this and other events, phone (323) 960-7782 or e-mail info@ladycavaliers.com.

The **Denver Center Theatre Academy** is sponsoring a two-day stage combat workshop on 21-22 February. Instructors include Aaron Anderson, Angela Bonacasa, Dale Anthony Girard, Geoffrey Kent and Robert Westley. For information and registration, phone (303) 446-4892 or access www.denvercenter.org.

BARTER, HIRE & BROADSIDES

THE GALLERY BOOKSTORE at 923 West Belmont Ave. has back issues of *Moulinet: An Action Quarterly*. They are now also available on-line through Advanced Book Exchange, Gallery Bookstore Ltd. inventory number 060 (Abe@Abebooks.com). Price, \$4.00 per issue. For further information, phone William Fiedler at Gallery Bookstore (773) 975-8200 or e-mail; ChgosOldst@voyager.net



Check out the
**Society of American
Fight Directors**
website
at
www.safd.org

We apologize for the delay in this issue's publication of *Moulinet: An Action Quarterly*. On October 23, a computer error erased all completed copy for the November issue, including reviews of *Alcatraz*, *Close My Eyes*, *North Shore Fish* and *Frodo-A-Go-Go*. The editors express their regrets to the fight directors and performers of those productions. A feature story on the SAFD workshop in Las Vegas was partially recovered and will appear later in 2004. The entire staff thanks our readers for all their patience and understanding.

SMILE WHEN YOU SAY THAT, MISTER: PLAYS FOR FIGHTERS

compiled by BeBe Swerdlow

Playwrights are starting to catch up with audiences' demand for realistic depictions of physical conflict, but stage combatants—women, particularly—still find few scripts lending their martial displays a context and providing opportunities to exercise their *acting* skills. Athletes do not usually have to play characters or deliver speeches more complex than “I’m the Big Guy and I’m gonna kick your ass”, but what separates the resumés including a Mercutio or a Macduff from those consisting wholly of “Soldier”, “Ruffian” and “Clown With Bat” is *verbal*, in addition to physical, agility.

So, in order to augment those old standbys—*Cyrano de Bergerac*, *The Three Musketeers* and *Zastrozzi*—here are some suggestions for fighters looking to cross words as well as swords:

The Fair Maid Of The West, by Thomas Heywood. This 1631 seafaring saga of an English-woman bent on rescuing her captured lover was adapted into a lively adventure yarn in 1994 by Kevin Theis for Chicago’s CT20 Ensemble. For information on this modern version, contact Theis at (312) 479-2378 or cyberactor@aol.com.

The Roaring Girl, by Thomas Dekker and Robert Middleton. Penny Penniston and Jeremy Wechsler’s 1999 adaptation for Shakespeare’s Motley Crew makes substantial changes from the original in transforming this obscure anomaly to a robust romp, but Merry Moll Cutpurse is a courageous and independent heroine guaranteed to appeal to modern audiences. Wechsler and Penniston can be reached at (773) 271-1431 or (773) 271-1562, and Laura Jones Macknin, artistic director of the Motley Crew, at (773) 878-3632.

The Count Of Monte Cristo, by Charles Albert Fechter, based on the story by Alexandre Dumas, *père*. The 1883 American classic that made a superstar of James O’Neill—Eugene’s father—might require

some dramaturgical adaptation to be rendered accessible to modern audiences, but if literary assistance is available, the challenge is worth the effort. And no royalties to pay. (Included in *Best Plays of the Early American Theatre*, edited by John Gassner.)

The Corsican Brothers, by Dion Boucicault, based on the story by Alexandre Dumas, *père*. This 1852 adventure of telepathically bonded twin brothers provided the basis for the 1941 film, starring Douglas Fairbanks, Junior. Flowery dialogue and period setting make this an ambitious project, but academically provocative. Also in the Public Domain. (Included in *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Michael Booth.)

Bloody Bess, by Stuart Gordon, William J. Norris and John Ostrander. Premiering in 1974 at the seminal Organic Theater, this straight-faced replica swashbuckler involves a patrician lady seeking revenge on the weasely navel officer who murdered her father. Revived in 2002 by Red Hen Theatre, rights to production are negotiated through the authors. For information on where to find them, contact Brian LeTraunik at (773) 728-0599 or Tybalt@msn.com.

The Lord Of The Rings: Part One, The Fellowship Of The Ring, adapted for the stage by Kevin McCoy. Part Two, *The Two Towers* and Part Three, *The Return Of The King*, adapted by James Sie and Karen Tarjen. Well before the film—1993 to 2001, to be exact—Chicago’s Lifeline Theatre mounted productions of all three parts of the Tolkien epics on a stage measuring a bare 28 X 30 feet. For information on rights, contact Lifeline Theatre at (773) 761-4477 or access www.lifelinetheatre.com.

Gloria, by Peter Hilton. This verse play by the *de facto* playwright-in-residence for New York’s Lady Cavaliers recounts the adventures of a princess questing through realms riddled with fantasy and danger. Its 2000 premiere was greeted with critical acclaim (especially the fighting nuns). For information on production rights, contact Carrie Brewer at (212) 726-8301 or info@ladycavaliers.com.

Camilla: Virgil's Warrior Princess, translated and adapted by Peter Hilton. The Aeneid tells of the princess Camilla, slain after leading a troop of women warriors against the Trojan army. (Her god-mother Diana sent an assassin—also female—to track down the enemy soldier who did it, but that's another story). Hilton's play premiered at the 2003 Women-In-Combat conference. For information, phone (212) 726-8301 or info@ladycavaliers.com.

Scavenger Hunt, by David Skvarla. Years before *Pirates Of The Caribbean*—a little over four, to be exact—Skvarla proposed a crew of undead pirates whose harassment of the heroes (and heroines) constitute a veritable catalogue of seafaring sword-and-sorcery swashbuckling. Query author at (773) 851-0376 or tomthecon@hotmail.com.

Bunny, the Undead Expediter: episode one - "You Brought Her...You Slayer", by David Skvarla. It's funnier if you know the television show, but the conflict between a squad of courageous, clean-cut teenagers and the evil Rasta Demon offers plenty of opportunities for combat. Query author at (773) 851-0376 or tomthecon@hotmail.com.

Mostly Guns and/or Fists:

Cementville, by Jane Martin. It's about an all-female pro wrestling team—and when it's written by the always-hip Jane Martin, what more do you need to ask? Royalties might be a bit on the pricy side, even for a play premiering circa 1994. Leased through Samuel French.

Yuba City, by Michael Sokoloff. The Good, the Bad, the Ugly—in fact, the whole Sergio Leone aesthetic—transferred to the stage by a former SAFD Fight Master-turned-playwright. "It sears like a branding iron on bare flesh" said one critic of National Pastime's 1997 production. "Kinetic tapestries of shivering sadism and balletic grace." said another. Rights belong to the author, presently living in retreat. Contact National Pastime Theatre at (773) 327-7707 for his whereabouts.

Pulp Fiction, adapted for the stage by Michael J. Allesandro from the screenplay by Quentin Tarentino. As faithful a screen-to-stage translation as you're likely to get. Most recently performed by Azusa Productions. For information, contact artistic director Maggie Speer at (312) 409-4207.

Red Dog Moon, by Michael Sokoloff. Said Mary Shen Barnidge of the 1994 production by National Pastime Theater, "a welter of noise, sweat, grunts, blood, leather, dust, wolf-howls, hyar-hyar guffaws,

ersatz-Indian heroic myth, more battlefield ghosts than *Macbeth* and enough Zen-laced hand-to-hand violence for a Bruce Lee film festival". Sokoloff has retired from public life, but you can contact the National Pastime folks at (773) 327-7077.

Short Plays:

The Killer And The Comic and *Never The Same Rhyme Twice*, by Rooster Mitchell. In the first of these one-act plays, an aging stand-up jokemeister spars with a serial murderer in a remote cabin. In the second, a group of female grifters and con-artists attempt to discover who's been dipping into their poker-party funds. Chicago's Mary-Arrchie Theatre Company and New York's 29th Street Rep both negotiated with the author for performance rights circa 1995. For information, phone Mary-Arrchie's Richard Cotovsky at (773) 871-1440 or 29th Street's David Mogentale at (212) 465-0575.

Catalan Grande, by David Bareford and Richard Gilbert. Written as part of R & D Choreography's Action Theater series, this short docudrama is set against the 20-year war between Spain and Catalonia commencing in 1640. Query authors at (773) 508-5260/5246 or bergerac@ix.netcom.com

Mrs. Garrud's Dojo, by Peter Hilton. A young suffragette turns to her ju-jitsu instructor for a solution to her husband's objections. Query author at (212) 726-8301 or info@ladycavaliers.com

The Silent Exchange, by Peter Hilton. At the dawn of the cinema age, a female director struggles with squabbling actors while filming Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. Query author at (212) 726-8301 or info@ladycavaliers.com

This Side Of Paradise, by Mariana Elder. A trio of Valley girls seek relief from tensions engendered by the upcoming Homecoming dance. Query author at (212) 726-8301 or info@ladycavaliers.com

Mlle. Maupin, by Ricki G. Ravitts. An 18th-century actress toys with her three suitors. The author doesn't say it's based on the Gautier novel, but ask her yourself c/o the Lady Cavaliers at (212) 726-8301 or info@ladycavaliers.com

And one big all-purpose anthology for the ladies:

Blood and Beauty, by Terry Kroenung. A volume of twelve short combat plays for women, featuring all weapons employed in SAFD instruction, in addition to a variety of found weapons (rolling pins, wooden hangers, garment racks, etc.). Scenarios include the courtship-by-combat of a young Macbeth and his future wife, an intimate look at Shakespeare's

whip-cracking Dark Lady, an art auction whose bidding process mimics Human Chess tournaments, and a knife duel in a Nazi death camp between a prisoner and her former lover. Available through most online bookstores, or contact the author at kroenung@peakpeak.com.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF FOOD FIGHT

by Mary Shen Barnidge

Shakespeare's three-part *Henry VI* is a chronicle of ambition, intrigue and bloodshed. But Edward Hall, director of the production—subtitled *Rose Rage*—at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, chose for his conceptual metaphor a slaughterhouse. And so although at no time during the course of the six-hour play are blades and bodies less than six feet apart, at every performance, two red cabbages representing the heads of condemned prisoners are shattered with one mighty sweep of the executioner's axe, and twenty pounds of raw organ meats are sliced, chopped and mutilated beyond recognition by a menacing chorus of cutlery-wielding chefs.

Physically, these dissections are no more brutal than those enacted in kitchens all over America, but the dramatic impact of culinary violence, when transferred in our imaginations to human conflicts, is undeniable. This particular brand of food fighting, however, presents additional challenges for back-stage personnel assigned to the storage and operation of these properties. Where does one procure groceries in the volume required for the long-running show? Where, in a facility unequipped for any cooking beyond coffee in the dressing-room, does one keep such perishable products? And what additional sanitation and hygiene measures must be implemented to deal with this peculiar situation?

"We learned, after several calls to butcher shops, that not all of them handle innards, or even do their own slaughtering on the premises," says CST production manager Jennifer Smith, "So we turned to wholesale meat distributors, who referred us to the company that is now our production's supplier. Since the meat is not for consumption, most of the health codes associated with food handling don't apply to us. We also provided the slaughterhouse with a written notice that we were using their meat for prop purposes only."

Next came the task of finding a secure repository

for what could, if not watched carefully, soon resemble unburied corpses in more than looks alone. As property manager Dan Nurczyk observes, "Blood is blood, whether animal or human. We talked about where would be the safest place to store and prepare the meat. [the play's action includes several scenes of slain enemies left to rot, replicated by meat packed into plastic bags and hung from scaffolds] It had to be both far away from people, but still close enough to the stage to access at all times."

After the meat is picked up every week and trucked to the theatre, it is moved to its own food service-sized refrigeration unit located below the stage. ("I carry 100 pounds of meat and vegetables through a trap-door and down a spiral staircase every week," Nurczyk remarks wryly, while Smith shrugs, "Out of sight, out of mind.")

How did the actors respond to the news that they were going to play with pig's guts? "Well, I wasn't around when they were told," Dan observes, "But I know they *were* all told before they auditioned."

"I was first asked to provide lungs, hearts and intestines," recalls Smith, "The lungs look good on the cutting tables. And the hearts are very important because there is a part in the show where a heart is supposed to be ripped from a body. But we take whatever we can get."

"Livers make a better sound when the cleavers strike the cutting board," adds Nurczyk, "There is also a moment in the show when an actor picks up some meat and slams it to the floor. This actor asked us for intestines—for the sound, and for the reaction it gets from the audience."

Slightly more difficult is the scene where an actor must eat a morsel picked from a skilletful of sizzling stir-fry. "Wouldn't you know that the *only* actor who has to eat the meat onstage would be a vegetarian!" sighs Nurczyk, "What you see in the frying pan is heart—it's easy to cut, and it doesn't smell when it's cooked onstage—*except* for a small piece of seitan kept aside in a place where the actor can reach it easily. A little sleight-of-hand and he's got the fake meat."

The recent Sanitation Workers strike made for inconveniences in other parts of the city, but not for CST, which has its own private disposal service. "We're being smart," Smith reports, "The minute there is any sign that the meat even *might* be turning,

out it goes. We wanted to make sure there was *no* possibility of the meat sitting out overnight."

Nurczyk affirms this, "We have wash rags, disinfectant hand-cream and hand wipes everywhere. We, ourselves, always wear gloves, and I clean everything the meat touches—cleavers, cutting boards, knives, pans—with bleach, because it disinfects on contact. Everyone backstage makes the actors feel as comfortable with their tasks as possible."

Had any of their previous training prepared them for this experience? "Coming from a performance art background, I was ready for just about anything," Nurczyk declares, "When we did *Julius Caesar*, it got kind of messy. The actors even got blood on the audience—fake blood, not like we have here. The actors are very professional about their jobs, but sometimes they will hear gasps or groans from the audience. Overall, this isn't really all that much different from any show where you use real food."

On the opening night of the play, performed in two parts with a dinner break in between, a rumor circulated among audience members that the box suppers had originally included a rare-roast beef option, but that the caterers had re-thought their decision after seeing the show. "I have heard no such stories," says Nurczyk, "But considering that the stage is covered in cabbage just before the dinner interval, I think it's funny that the salad in the vegetarian lunch has red cabbage in it."

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

WILD WEST DAYS

Willard Wood Park: 515 First St., Crete, Illinois

Hanlon-Lees Action Theater's Buffalo Bill Cody Wild West Stunt Show couldn't have asked for better weather than they found in Willard Wood Park at the 2003 Wild West Days festival. To be sure, the cool breeze tended to blow the aerial targets slightly off-course, but as Ned Buntline—played again by the versatile Jimmy Ellis—reminded spectators, "That's how you know this is a live show and not TV."

Reminders were largely unnecessary for audiences eager to welcome back their favorite acts from previous shows: the rope-spinning, gun-twirling Charley Keen, a taped score of quasi-Ennio Marricone music endowing his Gene Autry demeanor with mild-mannered machismo. And Chris Mitri, playing Chief

Rain-In-The-Face with unaffected dignity, whether engaging in a mock-heroic reenactment of the Buffalo Bill-Yellow Hand battle at Little Big Horn or *commedia*-style slapstick (notably a turn involving a short-sighted *vaquero* knocked on his *nalgas* by recoil from a sawed-off shotgun).

This year's script includes more historical data of interest to gun fanciers, with careful distinctions made between Springfields and Carbines, Marlins and Winchesters, derringers and the aforementioned "even a blind man could fire it" shotgun. Buffalo Bill and Yellow Hand now begin their fight on horseback, the better to demonstrate techniques of cavalry saber vs. war ax, before coming to ground in hand-to-hand combat.

Less martial are the sharpshooting exhibits (though a watermelon meets an untimely end in the course of a three-ricochet combination) by Trisha Mack, returning again in the role of Annie Oakley, who also contributes a number of balletic equestrian tricks (as contrasted with Mitri's more field-oriented saddle gymnastics). Clowning was supplied by Matt Stratton's Cole Younger and newcomer Duncan Ellis, playing a grizzled desert rat named Deadwood Dick—a villain "so mean, he steals candy from little kids and old ladies".

The newly-choreographed full-company finale dispenses with any attempt at staging a stagecoach robbery, earlier efforts to execute the necessary maneuvers within the limited arena having proved futile. Instead, we get a *bank* stick-up, Colonel Cody himself impersonating the humble teller who saves the day with the assistance of some noisy pyrotechnics and alternative-ending scripting. ("This is my show and the Good Guys *always* win!" the boss assures us.)

A NIGHT WITH THE FIGHTS

FAUST

fight choreography by Nick Sandys

The libretto for Gounod's opera specifies only one fight, this being a duel in which the virtuous Valentine is slain by a Faust rendered invincible though diabolical assistance. But trust Nick Sandys to inject the threat of violence into places the author never envisioned—having Marguerite's chaperone draw a flintlock pistol on the stranger invading her garden, for example.

Where Sandys' imagination manifests itself most vividly, however, is not the aforementioned duel—a simple matter of three 2-beat combinations, followed by Valentine assuming the advantage before his attention is diverted by a distraught Marguerite, whereupon Mephistopheles propels Faust's blade in a fatal thrust. Nor is it a catspat between two street women incorporated into the Carnival scene: a moose-and-squirrel tussle involving ear-pulls, hair-drag, dancerlike skip-kicks and the larger of the combatants holding her furiously-swinging opponent at arms' length.

At the end of the Carnival, after Mephistopheles—played by Samuel Ramey, the popular basso known as the “Mick Jagger of Opera”—has roused the suspicions of the village revelers, Valentine invokes the power of the Holy Cross to force the audacious demon into a (conveniently downstage) corner, the chorus of fellow soldiers and townspeople crowding behind. Mephistopheles retreats for a moment, but then turns and closes with Valentine in a grapple known to children the world over as a “mercy” contest. From that position, he proceeds to repel Valentine and his supporters, pushing them back across the square in a display of infernal might and crowd-pleasing heroics.

THE SWORDSMEN HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR — fight choreography by Douglas Mumaw and David Woolley

The new stage at Pheasant Run resort, according to veterans of its pre-renovation days, is much larger—certainly, it allows David Woolley and Douglas Mumaw, aka The Swordsmen, plenty of fighting room. But their sponsorship by the Noble Fool for this rare 8-week indoor appearance, coupled with the pressure of inaugurating the remodeled theatre, mandates some silly holiday slapstick in addition to their reliable routines (the latter often edited *ex tempore* to accommodate suburban playgoers demographically distinct from their customary RenFaire fans—childless audiences, for example, or near-unisex crowds).

Seasonal sketches include a sure-fire audience pleaser involving the ancient Mesopotamian festival of Zagmuk, the reenactment of which requires a child to impersonate the king—armed with a foam-rubber sword—who defeats the terrible sun-robbing monster (played by Woolley in an ingeniously-padded Star Wars-meets-Quetzalcoatl suit).

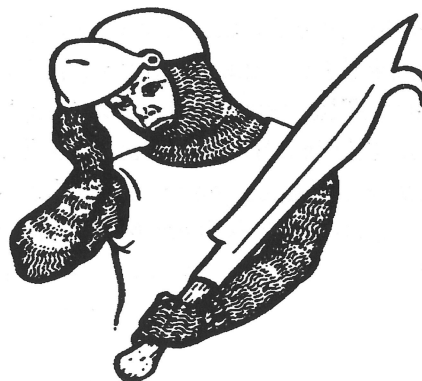
A scenario proposing a pair of reluctant gladiators booked for a Saturnalia in ancient Rome provides an opportunity for some bare-chested sword-and-buckler combat, but eventually sinks under a clutter of technical effects. The F/X equipment is used to better advantage in a finale pitting the Bold and Stupid Men against one another in futuristic light-blades and LED-sparking armor. That's right—*just* like walking Christmas trees. Fa-la-la-la-la...

DETECTIVE STORY

fight choreography by Matt Harding

The precinct-room for Strawdog's production of Sidney Kingsley's classic drama is larger than Mary-Arrchie's at Angel Island in 1990, but when you have 29 people sharing a storefront-sized stage, that still doesn't allow much space for a gumshoe to assault a suspect in a cramped office, and even less for a thug surrounded by several bystanders to break for freedom. Matt Harding solves the first fight by having the compassionless Lt. McCloud first shove his prisoner, then immediately close in to hugging range and from there deliver a belly-punch.

The second fight, involving the entire ensemble at the height of the dramatic tension, is more intricate. It is initiated by the hardened criminal taunting a first-timer until the latter tries to attack him despite being handcuffed to a chair. As the bully retreats, he notices a lawman bending over a desk, exposing the stock of his sidearm. Creeping low, the fugitive grabs the gun and pushes its owner aside to gain surveillance of the room. The first-timer promptly throws his body across his girl friend's to protect her, while a patrolman raises his baton in readiness. But McCloud, only a bare three steps away, walks straight into the gun. We hear the shot while killer and victim are virtually body-to-body, their proximity not only masking the actual discharge, but intensifying the willful sacrifice made by the suicidal hero.



**“We must have bloody noses
and cracked crowns.”**

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*

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