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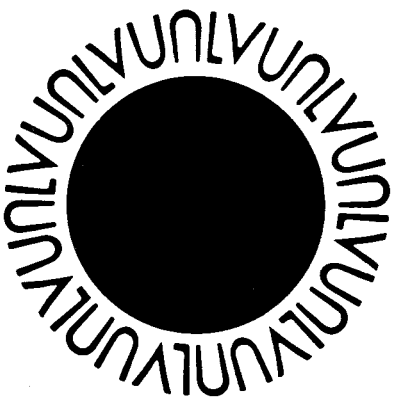
The Fight Master, January 1986, Vol. 9 Issue 1

The Society of American Fight Directors

The Fight MASTER

JOURNAL OF THE

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FIGHT DIRECTORS



UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

The Fight MASTER

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FIGHT DIRECTORS

January 1986
Volume IX number 1

FEATURE ARTICLES

REVIEWS

DEPARTMENTS

THE FIGHT MASTER

Journal of the Society of American Fight Directors

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

The election ballots were opened and counted on December 10th with Joseph Martinez being elected President and Drew Fracher Vice-President. Over half of the eligible members voted in the Society's first election.

This year, in order to disseminate information on the Society of American Fight Directors to a broader audience, I encourage any of our members who are associated with an educational institution to have their libraries subscribe to *The Fight Master.* The journal can be a valuable resource for students and would enable the Society to reach more people who are interested in fight choreography and stage combat. Your institution's library may contact Faxon Company Inc., 15 Southwest Park, Westwood, Mass. 02090 for suscription information.

In this issue J. Allen Suddeth shares with us a behind the scenes look and some helpful suggestions on staging fights for television and David Boushey opens the door for some film opportunities for those who are qualified and interested in getting involved in the film industry. *Dramatics Magazine* has given permission to reprint David Leong's article on "Staging Realistic Violence" and Richard Smith gives us a look at pro wrestling as a form of stage combat.

With this issue the "Letters" section begins to become a true forum for ideas with several members expressing divergent views on articles, Society practices and procedures. I look forward to this continuing to be a viable forum for our members.

Our members tend to move around a great deal. Please notify me of any change in address so that I may keep the roster up-to-date. Several issues come back with each mailing of *The Fight Master* with "address unknown" and there is then no way of forwarding the journal.

I have enjoyed working with Erik Fredricksen during his tenure as President of the Society and look forward to the New Year and the possibilities as the Society of American Fight Directors enters its second decade under the new leadership of Joseph Martinez.

■*Linda Carlyle McCollum*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am grateful to the membership for electing me President of the Society. I look forward to the challenges ahead in the next two years and to building on the sound foundations established by our former Presidents, David Boushey and Erik Fredricksen.

The officers of the Society have a responsibility to the health and longevity of our organization. We have a responsibility and indeed a mandate to provide leadership and to strengthen lines of communication among our members so that our areas of expertise may flourish in the entertainment industry. It is the very diversity of our talents and our universal commitment to excellence that I rely on now in accepting your confidence in me to continue to develop our unique network—The Society of American Fight Directors.

During my tenure as President the Society will celebrate the first decade of its existence (in 1987). I am sure we all have opinions of how our organization can be improved, but allow me to pause and recall what has been accomplished in such a short amount of time.

Where nothing but a loose scattering of free-lance entrepreneurs proficient in the teaching and directing of stage fighting existed in the United States prior to 1977, a collective identity was suddenly born. Almost overnight, the best stage fight choreographers in the country were talking to each other on a regular basis, thanks to David Boushey and the handful of founding members working at that time. In 1979-80 I created the first National Stage Combat Training Program, which has now become such an integral element in the Society's mission of providing the very best training in the Stage Combat Arts possible. A new standard of excellence began to be promoted through the Certification Tests conducted by the Fight Masters. Major Actor-Training institutions have come to respect and seek out the talents of members of the SAFD and to regularly incorporate training in stage fighting in their curriculum—thanks to the untiring efforts of members of our Society. Several thousand students have been trained in the basics of armed and unarmed stage combat, and I am sure that fewer injuries will result from the direct influence of the SAFD. We have stretched beyond our shores to Europe and Australia, and we have influenced the theatrical activities of our neighbors in Canada and Mexico. New and better weaponry for the stage is now available through the interest of a number of Society members, such as J.R. Beardsley, Jerome Smith and Chris Villa. In the professional arena, Society members are performing or choreographing stage fights in virtually every segment of the entertainment industry, and the hiring of a professional choreographer continues to become a standard practice, which was not the case at all prior to the efforts of the SAFD. And I must not neglect to mention this most important forum for our ideas and accomplishments, *The Fight Master,* now under the capable direction of our Editor and Secretary, Linda McCollum.

There is much much more I could relate concerning our organization's impact over the years, but now let's look at the future.

We have approximately two hundred *active* members on the roster. Every one of us has an obligation to promote our Society. Without your continuing imput, no amount of leadership can generate meaningful growth. I need to hear from you—each and every one of you. You have elected me. Now what do you want from this organization and what are you willing to contribute in order to see the changes and improvements that you desire? Send a card to me (P.0. Box 1053, Lexington, Virginia 24450) outlining your concerns and criticisms. Resolve to be more active in the Society this year, so that we can continue to build on our firm foundations.

During the month of January I will be appointing regional representatives, who will contact you in order to strengthen the lines of communication in your part of the world. By focusing on developing a regional consciousness, we can greatly enhance employment possibilities for our membership and offer more economical alternatives to the producers throughout the nation. Please respond as soon as possible to the SAFD regional coordinator who contacts you for information.

I am excited about the potential inherent in the SAFD. And I feel secure that together with the other officers, David Boushey, Linda McCollum and Drew Fracher and, of course, with your support, we will continue to be a significant force in promoting the Stage Combat Arts in the United States.

■*J.D. Martinez, President*

VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT

My Fellow Members,

It is with a great deal of pleasure and excitement that I tell you all thank you very much for your vote of confidence in electing me Vice President of the Society. I look forward to serving you all in the coming term and I have high hopes for a new direction for our organization. I foresee a great deal of change ahead for us; particularly in terms of the way in which others view us as an organization. Without change and forward progress there can be no Society, only stagnation. With this idea in mind I welcome the challenges put to us by the new year and the entertainment industry.

I am equally excited about the election of Joseph Martinez as our new President. For those of you that do not know, our collaboration began ten years ago when I became his student while in undergraduate school. I have worked for and with Joseph on many different projects and in many different roles over the years and thanks to your decision our collaboration continues. I can assure you all that we work quite well together and we both look forward to doing so for you. Let me close by emphasizing something that Joseph said in his report. The need for communication among us as members of the Society is imperative. Without communication within we will never be fully recognized without. I, too, urge each and every one of you to get in touch with either Joseph or myself to state your goals and needs as members of the SAFD. I will be getting in touch with all of the Associate members in the near future in an attempt to develop those lines of contact first. An organization is only as strong as its membership. Let us pledge in this new year to communicate and collaborate towards the common goal of advancement for us all by way of the SAFD. My thanks and best wishes to you all for the new year.

■ *Drew Fracher, Vice President*

TREASURER'S REPORT

Overall. the Society remains in the black and we can breathe another sigh of relief as we move into another year. It is always a struggle to keep financial responsibilities in the proper perspective, but with an eye to the books we can manage to maintain a solvent Society. I must add that it is my responsibility to keep a hold of the reins when it comes to expenditures, and I will continue to do so in the future. All members of the Society are obliged to submit a request for approval when allocating significant sums of Society money. For those members of the Society who wonder where the revenue goes. I can assure you that it goes into basic expenditures such as the Journal, promotion of the Society. the National Stage Combat Workshop and other basic services. What is left over goes into our market savings account which represents our general fund.

The 1986 dues are now due, and I appreciate those members who deal with this matter immediately. For those of you who have just paid your 1985 dues, I am afraid I must ask you to submit your 1986 dues. Please pay them no later than *March 1, 1986.* Don't put the Society in a compromising position by withholding your dues until the last moment. Do keep in mind that the Society now has imposed a penalty on those members who have been struck from the Society Roster for nonpayment of their annual dues and then opt to rejoin. I cannot say enough about how important it is that you pay your annual dues on time!

With the exception of the student members whose annual dues are fifteen dollars, all members owe twenty five dollars annually. If you joined after July 1, 1985, you only owe half of your annual dues. Please make your check out to: Society of American Fight Directors, and send it to: 4720 38th N.E., Seattle, Washington 98105.

I wish to thank my dear friend and colleague Erik Fredricksen for his years of service to the Society. He took us through some hard times and some good times and can now join the "club of former presidents" and take a deserved rest.

To all my colleagues, I wish you the happiest and very best year yet in 1986.

■ *DAVID BOUSHEY, Treasurer*

WORKSHOP REPORT

The 1986 National Stage Combat Workshop will be held at Memphis State University from July 14th through August Ist. I traveled to the host site recently to oversee the planning and execution of this upcoming event and must announce that the facilities are unconditionally the best we have seen to-date. The Theatre faculty, Chairman, Dean and the Assistant to the Dean are very supportive of the fight workshop. Susan Crietzberg, movement teacher and faculty member will serve as the on site coordinator.

The daily classes will be held on the mainstage and in the studio theatre of the Theatre Building. The mainstage is an unusually flexible space and will be used for the broadsword, quarterstaff, and rapier and dagger classes. It will also be used for the final showcase of the fight scenes *A Night at the Fights.* Adjacent to the mainstage is the studio theatre. This space will be used for the classes in court sword and unarmed combat. Equipped with mats, the room also has floor to ceiling mirrors on one wall.

All staff and workshop participants will stay in one of the campus dormitories. This facility, run like a dorm during the summer months includes weekly linen and cleaning service. Each of the suites has two bedrooms (two people to a room) with an adjoining bathroom and a telephone in each room. In addition to the adjacent bathroom, each room has its own sink. Messages can be taken at the twenty-four hour desk when participants cannot be reached in their rooms.

Shopping areas within three blocks of the university make it accessible to obtain groceries and other necessary items during the three week residency, and there is plenty of nightlife to experience in Memphis. In the planning stages are recreational events such as a visit to "Blues Alley," one of the city's popular night spots and a riverboat cruise on the Mississippi River.

The faculty for the workshop will be Patrick Crean, Allen Suddeth, Erik Fredricksen, David Boushey and David Leong. This will be Mr. Suddeth's first experience with the workshop and we all look forward to his participation. Special events include evening seminars on "Directing and Acting Fights for Film," and a workshop on sabre technique by Patrick Crean.

One of the greatest advantages in having the workshop in Memphis is its central location. The campus is only twenty minutes from the airport which is serviced by all major airlines. So join us for the Seventh Annual National Stage Combat Workshop. The $650.00 registration fee includes:

1. Up to eight hours of daily instruction on broadsword, quarterstaff, court sword, rapier and dagger, and unarmed combat;
2. Special evening seminars in teaching technique, choreography for stage and screen, and sabre technique;
3. Use of all weapons and facilities;
4. Housing, including linens and cleaning service;
5. Certification fee;
6. One year membership in the Society of American Fight Directors;
7. One year's subscription to *The Fight Master,* the SAFD's professional journal.

A non-refundable deposit of $100.00, due by May Ist, is necessary to reserve a place. The remaining $550.00 is due by June Ist. Brochures will be mailed to each member of the Society of American Fight Directors in early January.

For further information write to:
Susan Crietzberg (On Site Coordinator)
Memphis State University
Dept. of Theatre and Communication Arts
Memphis, TN 38152
(901) 324-0948

David Leong (SAFD National Workshop Coordinator)
Dept. of Theatre
NKU Campus Station
Highland Heights, KY 41076
(606) 572-5420

-5434

Initial membership in the S.A.F.D. is $25. Dues for Full, Associate, Affiliate Members, and Friends are $25 annually. Students are $15 annually. All membership dues are to be paid in January to the treasurer, David Boushey, 4720 38th NE, Seattle, Washington 98105.	Inquiries concerning new memberships, status or change of address should be addressed to the secretary, Linda McCollum, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Nevada, 4505 Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, Nevada 89154.	Application for change in status within the Society should be addressed to Joseph Martinez, P.O. Box 1053, Lexington, Virginia 24450.	Articles for consideration in *The Fight Master* should be submitted to the editor, Linda McCollum, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Nevada, 4505 Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, Nevada 89154.

SOAP FIGHTS

by J. Allen Suddeth

Why write an article on soap fights? Daytime mayhem? Afternoon action? Well, after five years and a hundred fights for all three networks, I feel that the differences between the stage and the soap are so great that they bear airing. Some of you doubtless have, or will, make the crossover from stage to screen, and many of the problems are the same. However, American network soap-operas are unique, for although they have money, they have no *time.* They are the true nine to five job in show biz, the daily grind that starts early in the morning, and tries to mash a full hour of programming in the can each day, every day, if they have to stay till dawn to do it. Pressure? You bet! But let's start at the beginning. . . .

THE DAY

Your call time is always early, anywhere from six to eight in the morning. Your first duty is the "Dry" rehearsal with the actors, all of whom are sleepy from working too late yesterday. The "Dry" is always in an empty room, plentifully supplied with coffee, but no props, and no furniture (Union rules!). Here you are allowed about fifteen minutes to teach the actors "the fight bit." Here also is where you see the actors' true skills, and, therefore, amending the fight (cutting) is usually necessary. It is best in this situation to expect nothing in the way of fight training, and then be grateful when you find it.

Now take two hours off while the rest of the show rehearses.

Next rehearsal is the "Camera Block," sometimes called "Fax" or "Facts." This rehearsal is mostly for the director and the cameramen and only incidentally a chance for you to run the fight on the set with the actors, furniture and props. Expect ten minutes here, total. Script in hand, the actors will walk through the fight. Here is where you show them their camera and align masking angles for the punches. Here also is where you argue with the director about shots.

Now take two hours off and eat lunch.

"Dress Rehearsal" is the last chance to make improvements and set the fight...if you are lucky, you'll get to do it twice here. Keep an eye here for surprises, like fifteen extras put into an already too small set. Grab the actors immediately after the Dress Rehearsal and review problems.

Now take two hours off.

"Tape Time" and this is it. When that red light goes on, even experienced actors pump adrenaline, so announce loud and clear that they should take it easy, and that no one is to get hurt or change anything. While the cameras set up, you may get a chance to run the moves once again, and to check all the props. If you've done your job, then this should be the payoff. Unfortunately, there usually isn't time for a second, third and fourth take as in the movies. When the scene is over, and you've checked for injuries, you wait for the signal from the booth that "it's a buy," and the rest of the show grinds on.

TYPES OF FIGHTS

There aren't many original plots left, as you know, and even less so on the soaps. Figure that most fight scenes center around love triangles, or important or missing papers, files, letters, gold, jewels. . . .fill in the blank. These are interspersed occasionally with scenes designed just to make a particular character look good. . . .the handsome doctor subdues a freaked out druggie amok in the emergency room. . . .the rich oil man on a bender cleans out a redneck bar. . . .the patriarch and pal take out a bar full of over zealous Romeos horning in on their gal. . . .all designed to make the contract principals look good. These are occasionally added to with various kidnappings, assaults, robberies, rapes, prison escapes, mortar attacks, arsons, sabotages, and mob strong-arm "reminders." Some of these scenes even further the plot, and care must be taken to make the appropriate character look good, regardless of fight ability. Often, the script designates only that "they fight," and it is left to you, the choreographer, with the director to really write the action sequence. This is the best of all possible worlds, as it leaves you free to hire trained fighters to surround the principals with and a clean slate to create a sequence especially for a particular actor (as long as the right guy wins).

PEOPLE TO HAVE ON YOUR SIDE

Cameramen. . . .these are the people that save your ass when it comes to masking punches, following the action, in short making *your* fight look good on tape. Get to know them, and tell them what to expect. Remember, they only get three rehearsals.

Carpenters. . . .or "Carps" are the guys to brace up a shaking wall fast, or even lean against it off camera for support.

Props. . . .if the prop people don't like you, you can forget about those little "extras," i.e., the unplanned breakaway bottle, the mattresses and foam to flip someone into, or a special prop. . . .a false rubber double of a sharp or heavy original to bean the star with.

Stage manager. . . .as they are the "boss" on the floor (everyone else being in the booth) they can make your life miserable, or they can support your work. By keeping him or her aware of the progress the actors are making on the fight, the stage manager can sometimes buy you some more time, help keep extra players out of harm's way, and ride herd on the technical staff.

Costumes. . . .perks to look for here are a stock of padding, particularly for knee and elbow, shin and kidney. Also, when the principals are doubled for difficult fights or stunts, there should be bulky clothes to hide pads and size differences.

Just as in a theatre production, the technical staff is vital to you in realizing an action scene. These people work hard and usually don't get enough information anyway, so keep them on your side, and keep them informed, and they'll work to make it look good.

STARS, TYPES, and PRINCIPALS

STARS: It happens occasionally that the soaps afford themselves guest stars. Often these are actors and actresses of some note, and great care must be taken in staging them. Usually, for an action scene, they are doubled, giving you the leeway to work with a professional. If not, fight the producers to hire experienced people for them to beat on. . . .this wisdom producers usually see. Treat a star with respect, and they'll usually do their best for you. . . .but do your homework—and make them look good!

TYPES: Watch for the actor with lots of resume experience that can't walk and talk at the same time. Watch for the nervous actor who never does the same thing twice. Watch for the "I've been in this business thirty years, and we didn't do that in Hollywood!" type. Watch for Karate blackbelts . . . .they hit people. Watch for booze or drugs after lunch.

PRINCIPALS: These are contract players who usually do the love scenes. Mostly they are thrilled to do something different and will work well with you. Some are bored and apathetic, but most look forward to action scenes. Don't forget the women. . . .get them involved in the action and don't let them just stand in the back looking shocked.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Let me put it to you in one word: cement!! Every floor of every sound studio is cement. This makes a major difference every time any actor falls to the floor. Pad everyone and everything. Put pads on all the actor's major joints, and hide pads or mattresses behind furniture, or off camera for falls and flips. Don't trust rugs to stay down on cement. They will bunch up and trip actors. Forget about nailing anything down. . . .glue it, tape it, or change it. The sets are never as big as they look on your television. Expect them to be tiny (they are) and crowded with expensive furniture, so be creative in moving furniture around and creating space *during* the fight. Turn over tables and push chairs out of the way. Often the director will approve these changes to the set. Ultimately everybody wants the show and the fight to look good, but there is tension on a set, and pressure from upstairs to get it right *fast.* You have to set the pace for a safe, realistic fight.

DIRECTORS

Talk to them! You need their input before sitting down with the script and creating the fight. Expect them to be helpful, though there are exceptions to this rule. Case in point: a director who "shoots all fight scenes in tight close up, so we miss all the punches." This kind of guy can make your day! Make it easy on them in your choreography. . . .not too many fancy angles and cuts. This is not the movies. Occasionally that director will change everything right before tape time. . . .be cool, and be creative. Your job is to make *them* look good too.

CAMERA TRICKS

Use all the tricks you can come up with. . . .this is a great place to learn three camera techniques and all that they can do for you. . . .many things that you could never do on the stage! Some examples:

1. **Isolated cameras**
   This is when each camera is recorded on a separate tape machine, and the fight is edited later, and not as it is happening. Very helpful for difficult stunts, gags and set ups.

2. **Handheld Camera**
   For different angles, and a more "realistic" look, the handheld is great. It must be ordered in advance as they aren't just lying around the studio, and they are expensive. Producers won't always go for this option.

3. **Stop Tapes**
   A technique to break up a long fight sequence, which will run later as a whole. Actors only do one phase of a fight at a time until the stop tape. Though expensive, as it means post-production editing, the stop tape is widely used. Especially helpful to replace stunt doubles, or before you destroy the set.

4. **Slow Motion**
   Expensive, but useful occasionally to augment action or dramatize a stunt.

5. **Make-Up**
   Progressive make-up during a fight scene, or series of scenes, is very effective and can add to the realism of the blows. A touch of blood, or a sponge in the cheek will also help the actor play the effects of the fight.

STUNTS

On the East Coast, the Network soaps are spending more and more money to beef up the daytime drama: expensive location shoots in Europe or the Caribbean; big budget-breaking stars as guests; and stunts! What kind? A short list would include:

stairfalls	high falls
fire gags	exploding jet ski
car chases	cars in a "near miss"
motor cycle dumps	man suspended from cliff ledge
swordfights	

To stage these kinds of gags, I can only urge you, warn you, caution you to know your limitations! The risks of injury multiply greatly with these kinds of difficult stunts, and I urge you to not try and coordinate them if you are not sufficiently experienced. When I am approached to stage "stunts," I look very carefully at them, and if they are too risky, I turn them over to one of the other qualified groups here on the East Coast. I can only recommend that you would do the same. . . .accidents hurt all of us.

CENSORSHIP

Once in front of the cameras on the studio floor, every move that is made is watched not only in the studio, but also at the Network Offices. There, a little person sits and watches all day, and is paid to censor material not suited to Network Standards. These people work for Program Standards and Practices, or for lily white producers such as Proctor and Gamble. The rules for daytime are very specific, and also very different from Prime Time. The ones mostly to remember are:

1. No kicks, knees, or punches to the groin.
2. No gun may ever be pointed at a person's head.
3. No knife may ever be pointed at a person's head.
4. Excessive beating, kicking or punching is forbidden.

There are other rules, mostly about sexual overtones, but the four above come up most often. As about one fight in four revolves around a gun, rule number two is a constant problem. If the gun even looks remotely like it is pointing at someone's head, the whole scene must be taped over!

UNION RULES

As a fight director, or stunt coordinator, you should be familiar with the AFTRA rules concerning pay for fights or stunts on television shows. Actors/actresses hired as fighters or stunt performers are paid as principals on daytime. I quote the AFTRA Network Television Reference Guide as follows:

Half Hour Shows		
Program fee	**# of hours**	**Overtime**
$357.00	8½ out of 9½	$47.00/hr.

One Hour Shows		
Program fee	**# of hours**	**Overtime**
$476.00	9 out of 10	$60.00/hr.

These fees are called "base pay" and often if a fight or stunt is extremely complex or dangerous an "adjustment" is negotiated to add on top of that base pay. There is not room here to detail all of the rules. They are available through the Union Office here in New York and through regional offices. In the New York office, I recommend speaking with Connie Best, a lady well versed in these rules, who deals with them every day. In short, though, know that:

1. If the stunt changes on the set, you can re-negotiate.
2. All reasonable requests and requirements for safety equipment shall be complied with by the Producer.
3. Equipment provided (breakaways, cars...) shall be in suitable condition.
4. If a stunt/fight is changed to be more dangerous, performer may refuse to perform the stunt as changed.
5. You have the right as a performer to have a fight director on the set.
6. You cannot be rigged with an explosive charge of any nature without a special effects person present.
7. At no time shall the Producer attempt to coerce the performer to engage in a hazardous stunt or action.
8. In any instance where fire is to be used in special effects, adequate fire safety precautions will be taken, and an individual qualified in fire control techniques will be present.

To these rules and guidelines I am enclosing an AFTRA "stunt" contract, which we have been using here in New York for the past year. This is signed by the actor and the producer and protects the performer's salary in case anything changes.

Now, as far as Unions for the fight director are concerned, as you all know, there are none. The Society of American Fight Directors is as much a union as the East Coast Stuntman's Association, the American Stuntman's Federation, Fights R Us, Stunts R Us, Stunts Unlimited, and any other group that wants to invent a name. That means that when you are out there in the theatre, on the set, or on location, because you are a representative expert, if something goes wrong, you, along with the producers, are liable.

The rules are quite different for the Screen Actor's Guild and movie stunts and fights. There have been significant advances there in contracts since the Vic Morrow and John Eric Hexum accidents. The Director's Guild has installed a safety hotline for producers for emergencies and difficult set-ups on set (D.G.A.Hotline 800-DGA-3457).

So there they are, a few of the basics of soap fighting — not so different in many ways from the stage, though sometimes it feels like directing a cat fight in a barrel under a stopwatch. Many of the same tricks can be used very effectively on TV that we use on stage, but the problems and set ups are different. Not only are you working under the gun of the clock, but nervous producers, censorship, and Union rules are much more stringent here than in the theatre. Staging these fights makes the rush of one week summer-stock look luxurious! Using video cameras to improve your technique is a very exciting way to prepare for possible film or prime-time work. I recommend those of you with facilities available to you to take advantage of them, and stage an occasional duel, brawl, assault or scuffle on camera. It is bound to teach you some new skills and improve old ones. This would be a good project for people in Universities, as they often have a surplus of equipment and few new project ideas. So go to, I say, go to. . . .roll tape, heave ho, turn on the lights and count 'em down!

SAMPLE

STANDARD AFTRA ENGAGEMENT CONTRACT FOR STUNT PERFORMERS FOR SINGLE TELEVISION BROADCAST AND FOR MULTIPLE TELEVISION BROADCAST WITHIN ONE CALENDAR WEEK

DATED: *5/10/85*

BETWEEN (Name and Address *Ester Victoria Blodgett*

1501 Broadway NY NY 10036 Hereinafter called "Stunt Performer,"

and *Proctor & Gamble/Compton Advertising*

_____, hereinafter called "Producer".

Performer shall render artistic services in connection with the rehearsal and broadcast of the program(s) designated below and preparation in connection with the stunt(s) to be performed:

TITLE OF PROGRAM: *The Young & the Rest of Us* EPISODE #: *9660*

TYPE OF PROGRAM: *Daytime Drama*

DATES: *5/10/85*

LOCATION: *CBS Bldg. 57th St. NY NY*

STUNT(S) TO BE PERFORMED: *Fight scene, breakaway table on head*

AFTRA CLASSIFICATION: *Principal Performer*

COMPENSATION: *$476.00*

STUNT ADJUSTMENT(S) (if applicable): *$100 for breakaway gag*

ADDITIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS (e.g., equipment): *pads*

Execution of this agreement signifies acceptance by Producer and Performer of all of the above terms and conditions and those on the reverse hereof and attached hereto, if any, except for stunt adjustment(s) (if applicable), payment for which is agreed upon after the stunt is performed.

(PRODUCER)
By _____

Ester Blodgett
Stunt Performer

444-1212
Telephone Number

Social Security Number

Corporate Tax ID Number, if any

STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. Performer shall render Performer's services in connection with this engagement to the best of Performer's ability, and subject to Producer's direction and control. Performer will abide by all reasonable rules and regulations of Producer, the broadcaster, the sponsor(s) and their advertising agencies, and Performer will refrain from any offensive or distasteful remarks or conduct in connection with this engagement. Performer shall, if and as required by this written contract, be available to participate in commercial inserts and leads into and out of such commercial inserts. The Producer, broadcasters(s), and the sponsor(s) and their advertising agencies may open and answer mail addressed to Performer relating to the program, provided that all such mail relating to Performer and intended for him or copies thereof shall be turned over to Performer within a reasonable length of time.

2. (a) Performer shall indemnify Producer, the sponsors and their advertising agencies, the network, and all stations broadcasting the program against any and all claims, damages, liabilities, costs and expenses (including reasonable attorney's fees) arising out of the use of any materials, ideas, creations, and properties (herein called "materials") whether or not required of Performer, furnished by Performer in connection with this engagement, and any ad libs spoken or unauthorized acts done by Performer in connection therewith. Producer shall similarly idemnify Performer in respect to "materials" furnished by Producer, and acts done or words spoken by Performer at Producer's request. Each party will give the other prompt notice of any such claims and/or legal proceedings (and shall send a copy of such notice to AFTRA) and shall cooperate with each other on all matters covered by this paragraph.

(b) If this agreement requires, as an express additional provision, that Performer furnish materials (herein called "required materials") in connection with his performance hereunder, Performer shall submit such required materials to Producer at such time prior to performance thereof as may be reasonably designated by Producer, and such required materials shall, as between Producer and Performer, unless otherwise expressly provided in this agreement under the heading "Additions", be and remain the property of Performer.

3. In full payment for Performer's services and the rights and privileges granted to Producer hereunder, Producer shall pay Performer the compensation hereinbefore specified not later than Thursday after the week during which Performer's services shall have been rendered, subject to the deduction of such taxes and withholdings as are authorized or required by law. There shall be no obligation on Producer's part to produce or broadcast the program or to use Performer's services or materials, if any.

4. The program hereunder may be originally broadcast either live or by recording over the facilities arranged by or for Producer. The term "recordings", as used herein, shall mean and include any recording or recordings made whether before or during a broadcast transmission, by electrical transcription, tape recording, wire recording, film or any other similar or dissimilar method of recording television programs, whether now known or hereafter developed. All recordings as between Producer and Performer shall be Producer's sole property, but shall be subject to the restrictions contained in the AFTRA Code in effect at the time such recording is made, except as AFTRA may otherwise permit in writing. Performer will, if required by Producer, re-enact the performance, in whole or in part, in connection with any recording of all or any portion of the program (which Producer may deem desirable) in order to make adjustments necessitated by mechanical failure, or adjustments or corrections in performance after the date of performance, provided that such recording is done not later than seven (7) days after the broadcast in the case of a live program or seven (7) days after the Performer's final performance day in the case of a pre-recorded program and at a time which does not conflict with Performer's other bona fide commitments and provided, further, the Producer shall pay for Performer's services in connection with such re-recording such additional compensation as may be required by the said AFTRA code.

5. If the broadcast of any program hereunder is prevented by governmental regulation or order, or by a strike, or by failure of broadcasting facilities because of war or other calamity such as fire, earthquake, hurricane or similar acts of God, or because of the breakdown of such broadcasting facilities due to causes beyond Producer's reasonable control (such as the collapse of the transmitter due to structural defects), Producer shall be relieved of any reponsibility for the payment of compensation for the program so prevented; Provided that in such case Producer shall reimburse Performer for all out-of-pocket costs necessarily incurred in connection with such program. In addition Performer shall be paid the full applicable rehearsal rate for all hours rehearsed prior to notice of cancellation. The same consequences shall ensue if the program time is preempted by a Presidential broadcast and notice of cancellation for such purpose is given Performer promptly upon such notice having been received by Producer. Where the program time is preempted to broadcast and event of public importance (other than a Presidential broadcast) or where the program is cancelled or prevented for any reason other than those stated above, or where insufficient advance notice has been given under the preceding sentence, Producer shall pay Performer his full contract price for the program so cancelled or prevented.

6. Producer is prohibited from requiring the performer to refrain from rendering his services in connection with any other television or radio services for any period other than the actual rehearsal and broadcast period involved in this engagement; provided, however, that this prohibition shall not apply if the artist's compensation for this engagement shall be $1500.00 or more.

7. Notwithstanding any provision in this agreement to the contrary it is specifically understood and agreed by all parties hereto:

(a) That they are bound by all the terms and provisions of the applicable AFTRA Code of Fair Practice for Television Broadcasting. Should there be any inconsistency between this agreement and the said Code of Fair Practice, the said Code shall prevail; but nothing in this provision shall affect terms, compensation, or conditions Provided for in this agreement which are more favorable to members of AFTRA than the terms, compensation or conditions provided for in said Code of Fair Practice.

(b) That the artist is covered by the provisions of Paragraph 102 of said Code entitled "AFTRA Pension and Welfare Funds."

(c) That Performer is or will become a member of AFTRA in good standing, subject to and in accordance with the Union Shop provision of said Code of Fair Practice.

(d) All disputes and controversies of every kind and nature arising out of or in connection with this agreement shall be determined by arbitration in accordance with the procedure and provisions of the said AFTRA Code of Fair Practice.

8. If Producer wishes to obtain re-play or foreign use rights for which fees are required pursuant to Paragraph 73 of the AFTRA Code, such fees as are agreed upon shall be separately set forth in this Agreement in specific money figures, clearly stating the rate to be paid for each re-play or foreign use, and not by reference to Code paragraph numbers. If Producer has not obtained foreign use rights in accordance with this paragraph, Producer shall notify AFTRA in advance if after the execution of this agreement, Producer seeks to secure such rights from Performer.

9. This agreement, when executed by Performer and Producer, shall constitute the entire understanding between them, and shall be construed according to the laws of the State of_____

ADDITIONS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN APPROVED BY AFTRA ARE NOT PART OF STANDARD FORM.

STAGING REALISTIC VIOLENCE

by David S. Leong

(Reprinted from *DRAMATICS* April 1985)

You're watching a mesmerizing production of *The Zoo Story,* totally engaged by the interplay between these two strangers in a park. Then when the climactic stabbing occurs, it's so obviously fake that you can only lean back in your seat and chuckle. The play's power is greatly diminished and you, as a member of the audience, feel cheated.

Another example: *West Side Story.* Riff and Bernardo stand tense, switchblades clutched in their white-knuckled fists while the angry taunts of Jets and Sharks build to a crescendo. Suddenly Tony darts forward to break up the fight and Bernardo plunges his knife into Riff. But what the audience sees is the knife passing harmlessly under the actor's arm, and then the "dead" Riff lying on stage with his obviously unwounded chest heaving up and down. Once again, the audience is disappointed that the climactic moment in the play was not real.

These scenes of unintended comedy happen all the time, not only on the stages of high schools and colleges, but also in professional theatres. There's a lot of violence in the theatre today, and the sad truth is that much of it is done badly. When that happens, the play suffers. A great number and variety of contemporary plays contain violent scenes. If a play is staged realistically, as the majority of contemporary plays are, then any fights or other violent actions must be presented realistically and believably or the production will suffer.

There's a crucial difference between violence in a realistic contemporary play and violence in a classic play. In a realistic play, what happens on stage looks like a slice of life. Every action, every thought must be true, or at least it must look true and believable to the audience. Classic plays, on the other hand, are less concerned with his kind of realistic truth. The mere fact that the classic play takes place in a time period other than our own allows us to distance ourselves from the action and stay involved. The language, design, acting, and even movement is almost always stylized in a classic play. The audience accepts these conventions of style, and that gives the director some latitude to stretch the truth in staging fights. That's not to say the action doesn't have to be spontaneous, immediate, urgent, logical, and, on some level, believable. But it means that the audience is prepared to accept that Cyrano de Bergerac can compose a romantic ballad while fencing with a young upstart, killing his opponent on the final refrain, or that D'Artagnan can fight ten duels in a short time, escape without a scratch, and receive a pardon from Cardinal Richelieu. We can even believe that after an intense rapier and dagger duel, in which he suffers a mortal stab wound to the chest, Mercutio is able to talk on in iambic pentameter for two minutes! We accept these implausible actions because they are consistent with the style of the play. But how would you feel if a character in a contemporary play were to compose a poem while slashing up a friend with a knife?

There's another qualitative difference between the violence in classic plays and in modern or contemporary plays. In a classic play, staging a fight scene usually means one thing: some sort of swordplay. But the varieties of violence a director of contemporary plays may be required to put on stage are limited only by the imagination of playwrights and by technology. In the past few years I've directed actors throwing knives into each other's backs, bashing people over the head with a log, stabbing people in the chest with an arrow, burning peoples' eyes with ammonia, bleach and insecticide spray, wrestling people to the floor and injecting them with a hypodermic needle, and countless stair rolls, high falls, chokings, hair pulls, slaps, punches, bites, kicks, shootings, stabbings, and rape scenes.

If there's so much violence on stage these days, why is so much of it badly done? There are several reasons. Sometimes—because of lack of understanding or an overestimation of their own capabilities—directors don't feel the need to consult an expert in stage violence. With very little or no training, they say, "I can stage the fight myself." Sometimes directors know they need the help of a specialist with a fight scene, but they don't have the money to hire one. Frequently directors fail to comprehend the psychological importance of the violence to the characters and either cut the violent action altogether or stage it in a half-hearted way.

Whatever the reason, the result is often violence that is not performed safely or believably, and sometimes not performed at all. In either case, the play suffers.

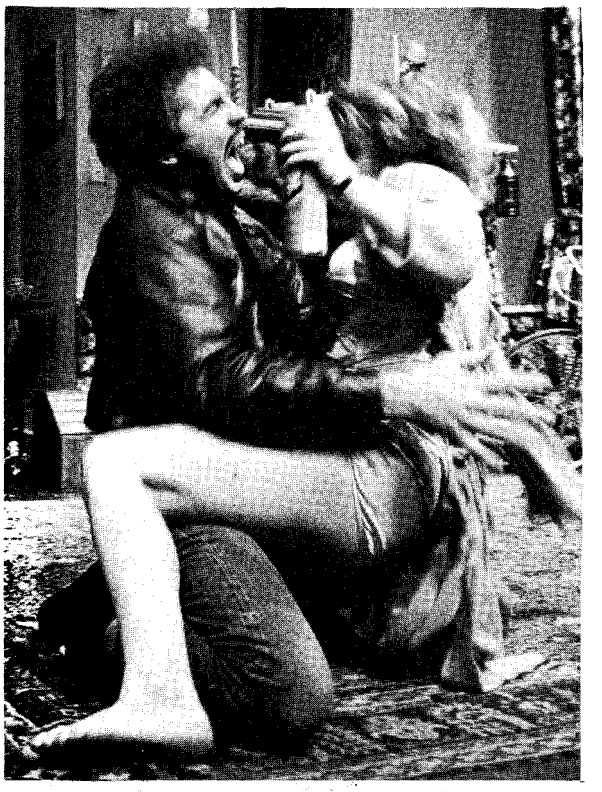
Before cutting or even lessening the amount of violence suggested by the playwright in a realistic modern or contemporary play, examine its importance to the script. What is the significance of this action? Does it make a character statement, or affect one or more characters in some way? Does it further the story line? Did the playwright intend for the audience to see the violence? Consider the actors. Sometimes they need to use the violence in one scene to propel them forward, psychologically, into the next scene. If you remove it, you may damage the actors' sense of immediacy and involvement, in addition to making it more difficult for the audience to understand the play.

For example, in my direction of William Mastrosimone's *Extremities* at Northern Kentucky University this year, I actually *added* violence, actions that had been cut by the playwright and were supposed to happen between the scenes of the first act. Instead of requiring the actors and the audience to imagine what was happening during the blackouts, we performed these actions and played the entire first act without stops. The inclusion of this violence kept the actors in the present tense throughout the play. This was demanding and difficult but the performance level was extremely high because of the "truth" that existed on stage.

Quite often, if a director decides not to cut violent scenes, he or she waits until the final stages of rehearsal to prepare them. In the worst case, the director says to the actors involved, "Go off and stage the fight. Then come back and show me what you've got." These kinds of jury-rigged fight scenes are not only unlikely to be believable, but they are also dangerous. When actors try to stage violence without training and without direction, accidents abound.

Violent scenes are often the most difficult part of a production, and the director must begin working on them in the earliest stages of his or her preparation. What follows is a discussion of a practical method of staging violence. I am not going to discuss techniques of stage violence—how to execute specific actions like slaps, punches, chokes and so on. That information is available elsewhere; a good basic text is Joseph Martinez's *Combat Mime: A Non-Violent Approach to Stage Violence,* published by Nelson-Hall.

When the preparation of stage violence is treated as an organic part of the rehearsal process, it becomes much like the preparation of other aspects of the production. First, of course, you read the script and familiarize yourself with the play and the characters. Then you begin asking questions. The answers to these questions will help you shape the violence so that it suits the needs of the script, the director, the actors and the technical staff.



THE SCRIPT. Describe each of the characters. What is each character's ultimate aim in the violent sequence? To kill? To wound? To knock to the floor? To bruise but not to cut? Are the characters aware of their intentions? That is, are they in control of their emotions? Their physical actions? A character who is in physical control looks very different from one who is out of control. What does the victim try to do? Escape? Fight back? Submit? What is the psychological relationship between the attacker and victim? Are they friends? Strangers? Husband and wife? Lovers?

THE DIRECTOR. Violence doesn't happen in a vacuum. It grows out of some action in the play and leads to some other action. A primary consideration in directing a fight should be that it serves the director's concept of the play. It must move the play along and help make it work.

Some questions to ask: Where are the characters at the start of the violence? At the end? the answers to these will describe the movement patterns needed for the fight. Do the actors carry or use any weapons or other objects? Have these characters ever used any weapons or other objects? Have these characters ever used these weapons or objects before? Have they ever been in a similar situation? Are there other people watching? If so, do they participate in the action? How long should the violence last? (A short fight is about ten seconds; ten to thirty seconds is of medium length; anything longer than thirty seconds is long.) What props are nearby for them to use? Is there music? (In a realistic play, probably not. Music tends to stylize the action.) Should blood be used? The answer to this last question may depend on the audience's proximity to the stage. In an intimate theatre, it's very difficult to conceal blood packs from the audience. Stage blood can be effective, but don't wait until tech rehearsal to begin experimenting with it.

THE ACTORS. What are your actors capable of doing? Have they ever acted in violent scenes before? Are there any physical limitations on their part (bad knees, back trouble, tendonitis)? Ask the actors how they view the characters in the fight. What do they think about the action?

THE TECHNICAL STAFF. Remind the technical staff that stage violence requires special attention to safety. Try to avoid using breakable glass if possible. Certainly the fight between Hanna Mae and Maude in *A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking* demands that glass—or actually a coffee cup—be broken. But you can still substitute plastic for glass for all but one or two coffee cups. Check the entire set for sharp objects—tacks, staples, nails, etc. Secure rugs to the floor and test the durability of the furniture and hand props used in the violent action. Also check for sharp edges on steps, furniture, and props. They can cause nasty cuts.

If there are prop switches to be made during the running of the show, designate someone—usually the stage manager or an assistant—to make sure that the switch is accomplished every time. In my production of *Extremities,* a real can of Raid (used upstage to create the proper odor) is switched with a can of mineral water disguised to look like the insecticide. The mineral water is later sprayed into an actor's eyes; one would hate to imagine what could happen if the prop crew missed the switch.

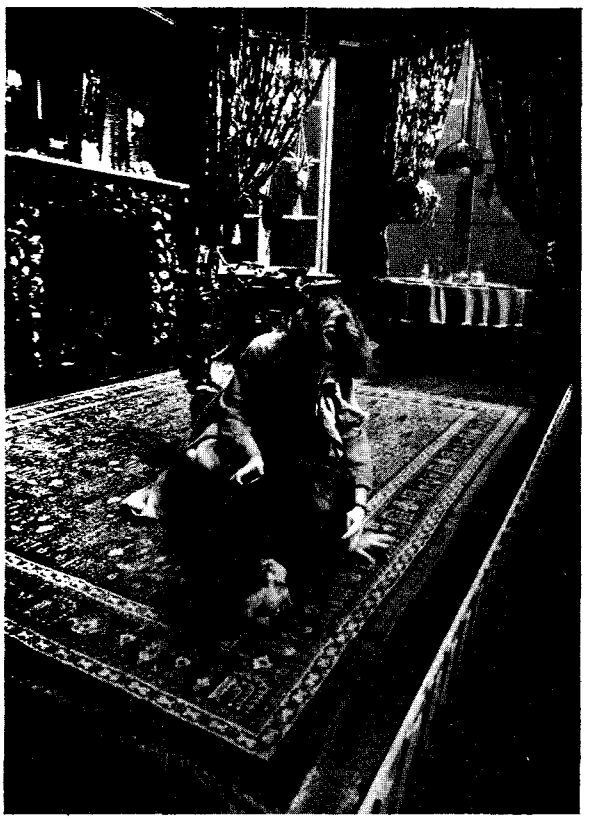
Some other technical considerations: Costumes should be designed to allow for padding, if necessary. Actors should rehearse in the same shoes they'll wear for performances. If blood or retractable knives or other gimmick props are used, the prop crew and the actors who will use them should be trained as early as possible.

Now that you've completed the preliminary research for the stage fight, it's time to translate your ideas into action and sound. Some of this can be done on paper; some will need to be worked out in rehearsal. Unlike a fight scene in a play like *Macbeth,* where you can choreograph every movement of the sword, realistic violence cannot be worked out beat by beat on paper. You must suit the action to the character *and* to the actor. And you must enlist the assistance of your actors in getting the action to say what you want. The best way to explain that process is to tell you how we prepared the violence in *Extremities.*

The first act of *Extremities* includes a very long violent sequence in which Raul attempts to rape Marjorie. Marjorie resists and manages to turn the tables on Raul by spraying insecticide in his face. Eventually she ties him up and imprisons him in her fireplace.

As the director and violence coordinator for the production, I knew I wanted Marjorie to tie up Raul, get him into the fireplace, and beat him with the fireplace poker and shovel. I began planning the scene by writing a broad, skeletal outline of what was going to happen, based on the dialogue and stage directions. Here's part of it:

> "Marjorie sprays Raid in Raul's face. She attempts to get away. Raul grabs her. Marjorie eyes an extension cord, manages to rip the cord out of the electrical outlet, wraps it around Raul's neck and chokes him. She then ties his hands together, lashes his ankles to one another, and finishes the procedure by blindfolding him. Raul must end at center stage, ready for Marjorie to drag him straight upstage to the fireplace."



Using slow-motion improvisation, after a thorough vocal and movement warm-up, of course, we started working on the first part of the sequence in which Raul, blinded by the insecticide, grabs Marjorie's legs as she tries to get away. Every movement of each actor was performed again and again until we found a way that looked right for the moment, felt right to the actors, and was safe for them to do ten times out of ten. Then we reran the section some more, looking for certain "cues" that would enable the actors to let each other know when they were ready to go on to the next movement in the choreography.

Once we finished that section, we attacked the next one: how Marjorie should go about ripping out the extension cord, wrapping it around Raul's neck, and jerking him off the floor so she can tie his wrists together. Again, we proceeded with slow motion improvs until the actors could perform the section without thinking about it. We had to do and redo this business until we came up with a solution that would allow Marjorie to perform the complex operation safely, effectively, and with an economy of motion—I was concerned that the action not look too frantic and busy.

Remember that the process is very different from choreographing a sword-fight, in which the director figures out each movement in advance and teaches the actors the choreography. It might be possible to work out a realistic fight sequence like the one in *Extremities* on paper, but it would take weeks and it probably still wouldn't work on stage without some modification. How would you decide, for example, how many times Marjorie must wrap the extension cord around Raul's wrists before looping it around his neck, without knowing how big Raul's wrists are or how long the cord is? Slow motion improvs with actors are the only practical way of developing the choreography for a realistic stage fight.

As I recall those long and arduous evenings of rehearsal, two pieces of advice come to mind:

Always try to eliminate what I call "variables." These are actions that cannot be relied upon one hundred per cent of the time. For example, we used a pair of specially rigged combination locks that I had hoped would make it easier for Marjorie to secure a bicycle to the fireplace to trap Raul inside. Because they were made to snap open with a minimum of force, they kept popping open whenever Raul banged on the bicycle. That's an undesirable variable. We cut them and replaced them with unaltered combination locks, and wrote the combination of the lock so Marjorie could see it without the audience's knowledge.

Always build in alternatives in case something unexpected occurs. On several occasions, Raul's blindfold fell off. If you're familiar with the play, you know that this can cause serious problems. In anticipation of just this kind of accident, the actors talked about ways they could cue one another in case something happened. As a matter of fact, Raul's blindfold fell off a number of times in performance, but the actors' preparation enabled them to cover quite well.

The process of trial and error and slow motion improv goes on and on until all the parts of the violence sequence are complete. Then the sequence is run and run and run until it can be brought up to playing tempo, which is three-quarter speed, and vocal effects are added. (Fights should always be performed at less than full speed for two reasons. One is safety; at full speed, it's too easy for the actors to lose control. The other is that full speed is too fast for the audience to follow the dynamics of the violence.

After the violence is completely choreographed, spend some time checking your work. If possible, ask some people who are unfamiliar with the play and with stage combat techniques to observe a rehearsal. Look to see if the action is safe and believable and appropriate to the scene and the characters. Are the actors in control? Are the techniques properly hidden from the audience? Have you eliminated as many variables as possible and prepared the actors for unexpected situations?

When you're satisfied with the choreography, consistency becomes very important. Avoid last minute changes. Your actors need to keep repeating the same business over and over again.

When the play goes into performance, nightly run-throughs of the violence sequences should be conducted before each show. These consist of a thorough warmup, followed by a walk-through of all violent scenes. A member of the production staff should be designated to observe this work to make sure the violence remains safe and believable.

Stage violence is—or should be—an integral part of the acting process. When you fail to give it the special attention it requires, you're flirting with disaster. You run the risk of accidental injury to an actor or a member of the audience, and even if your actors manage to make it through without hurting anybody, some damage to the play is almost a certainty. The method outlined here is a systematic approach to creating realistic stage violence that is safe and believable. It takes time and hard work to analyze, prepare, create and rehearse the violence in a realistic contemporary play. But if you don't have the time and energy to do stage violence right, you shouldn't be doing it at all.

ADVANCED WORKSHOP IN THE STAGE COMBAT ARTS, summer 1985

by J.D. Martinez

Picture this if you will. Clear blue skies above a remote valley in the famed Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. A babbling brook cascades into a mountain river teeming with Rainbow Trout, creating a musical background to the ring of steel swords, as a dedicated group of stage swordplay enthusiasts begin another grueling day of training in this bucolic setting.

Some of the finest stage swordfighters (both male and female) in the United States assembled at Mill Branch, the mountain home of Fight Master J.D. Martinez, to take part in a unique experience—the first advanced workshop in the stage combat arts. For two weeks eleven advanced students trained from 9:30 in the morning until 8:30 at night every day.

The four student-choreographers and seven combatants, coming from as far afield as Colorado and New York City, trained in a wide variety of weapons: Rapier & Gauntlet, Rapier & Dagger, Rapier & Cloak, Case of Rapiers, Sword & Buckler, and three separate forms of Quarterstaff. All of the participants camped on the grounds and were served a huge breakfast and dinner each day. The amenities were quite primitive, such as only cold-water showers (each morning was usually pierced by wild shouts from the shower stalls!), and outdoor chemical privies. However, a beautiful private swimming pool beside a waterfall next to the camping area on the grounds seemed to make the apparent hardships melt away each afternoon.

The daily schedule was designed to accommodate the needs of the student-choreographers and the combatants. Breakfast was at 8:00 a.m. each morning. At 9:00 a.m. the student-choreographers met with Fight Master J.D. Martinez to discuss their choreographic challenge for the day. Each choreographer was assigned combatants, a type of staging (proscenium, thrust, arena) given a piece of music, and presented with a specific focus for a stage fight which he would be required to choreograph that very evening. The weapons to be used in the stage fight he was to choreograph were those same weapons being presented in classes to the combatants that day.

At 9:30 a.m. all of the participants were led in a warmup. At 10:00 a.m. the first class of the day began. The first class lasted for two hours; then the students took a two hour break.

During the breaks, the choreographers would work on creating their fights. The combatants would exchange ideas on their own expertise, or relax by poolside. At 2:00 p.m. the second class was conducted for two hours. at 4:30 p.m. dinner was served beneath the pavilion by the two master chefs.

The final session of the day began at 6:00 p.m. In this session the student-choreographers worked with their assigned combatants on the piece of choreography which they had been creating all day. One and a half hours was alloted for rehearsal of the choreographic piece. Then at 7:30 p.m. the staged fights were all video-taped. Following the taping, all of the participants assembled at the pavilion for viewing and a critique by Fight Master J.D. Martinez. Following the critique the day's formal sessions concluded. However, a classic movie which featured sword fighting, such as *The Duelist,* or *The Sea Hawk,* was shown each

night for anyone who wished to attend. The movies were very popular events, complete with beer and popcorn!

The pace of the workshop was very brisk, as all of the participants were very well versed in the handling of weapons. During the workshop all of the SAFD Certification Fights from the SAFD National Stage Combat Training Programs since 1980 were presented and recreated. In addition a tremendous amount of new material was presented and practiced. Pertinent passages from historical fencing manuals were duplicated and given to all of the students. In addition, a copy of all of the video-taped stage fights created each evening by the participants was sent to every student.

On one particular day in the second week of the workshop all of the combatants were given the opportunity to try their hand at choreographing a short fight. These fights were also video-taped and critiqued. The last two choreographic sessions of the advanced workshop were devoted to a team-choreographed mass-battle. Two of the student-choreographers were teamed up in order to co-create a mass battle, utilizing all of the weapons introduced in the workshop, with the music and staging of their choice. Five hours of rehearsal time was alloted for the mass-battle projects.

Some extraordinary examples of excellent stage fighting were created by the participants at this advanced workshop. Everyone improved tremendously over the two week period. The training was physically and mentally challenging. Bodies adapted, sometimes painfully, and everyone's sense of timing, agility and combat vocabulary improved. New friendships were forged and several old acquaintances were re-united.

The Irish Creek Academy Advanced workshop in the Stage Combat Arts is yet another example of the important role played by the Society of American Fight Directors in the development of stage combat in the United States.

Anyone interested in attending the next advanced workshop to be conducted by J.D. Martinez in the summer of 1986, should write now to: J.D. Martinez, Irish Creek Academy, P.0. Box 1053, Lexington, Virginia 24450.

PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING AS STAGE COMBAT

by Richard D. Smith

"It's an elocution problem," said a Guthrie official. "We needed advice from somebody in the community who has spent time rolling on the floor in a theatrical situation while trying to speak...under duress."

—a Tyrone Guthrie Theatre (Minneapolis) representative on why pro wrestling star Verne Gagne was brought in to coach an actor playing Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest.*

"In some ways, it reminds me of a Jacobean tragedy."

—Edward J. Golden, director of Baltimore's Center Stage, upon viewing professional wrestling for the first time.[1]

In the past year, pro wrestling has experienced a surge of nationwide attention and an increase in national popularity. But for decades, pro wrestling has flourished as a sports entertainment industry in America despite a lack of coverage by the mass media.

For example, when all the paid admissions to sports events in all arenas big and small across the country are tallied, horse racing and auto racing compete for first place, and pro wrestling is third. More "legitimate" sports, such as football, baseball, basketball and hockey are behind.[2] In addition, pro wrestling shows on television were consistently at or near the top of their time slot ratings in most major broadcast markets long before pro wrestling exploded as a fad in 1984 and 1985.[3]

So it is interesting—but perhaps not surprising—to note that a great deal of coverage of pro wrestling in the news media has been condescending, even hostile. It seems as if the media establishment refuses to admit that such immensely popular entertainment could have been carrying on without its imprimatur.[4]

Of course, the common dismissal made of pro wrestling is that it's "faked."

Certainly—as anyone knowledgeable in combat sports or stage combat can immediately recognize—pro wrestling is not a true competition. It is a sports entertainment where the action is choreographed. If a critic takes the position that pro wrestling shows are claimed by promoters and participants to be real competitions, then criticism may be justified (actually, participants rarely make such claims unless they are challenged by their detractors).

However, there is a necessary "flip side" to this controversy. If pro-wrestling is a choreographed entertainment, then it has not received the credit it deserves as an entertainment. While TV shows regularly come and go between residues of summer reruns, some pro wrestling shows have been on television—continuously and without repeats—for over thirty years.

Therefore, what ought to be of great interest to members of the Society of American Fight Directors is that in terms of sheer audience numbers and longevity pro wrestling is arguably the most widely watched and most popular form of stage combat in the world, with the possible exception of movie stunt work.

I do not suggest that pro wrestling is the best form of combat mime or the most realistic (although the fact that such debate remains about its reality says something in its favor). Nor should readers of *The Fight Master* expect to market their skills choreographing pro wrestling bouts (given the closed nature of the world of pro wrestling, this isn't likely to happen, although SAFD members could probably make some worthwhile contributions).

But it is strongly suggested here that pro wrestling be given attention by fight choreographers and actor/combatants to appreciate both its strengths and its weaknesses. This article serves as a lengthy introduction, but it is by no means definitive. With the necessary background, however, the reader may better understand this colorful and immensely successful form of combat mime.

Over two years ago, I attempted to interest magazines in an article on pro wrestling as an incredible social and entertainment phenomenon. No luck.[5] I then watched rock singer Cyndi Lauper become involved with the pro wrestling shows of the New York and Connecticut based World Wrestling Federation (WWF), laying the groundwork for the "Wrestlemania" closed circuit extravaganza that changed pro wrestling from low brow to chic in the national view (my

feelings ranged from smugness for my prescience to the despair that comes in watching a stock you couldn't buy go up two thousand percent in value).

It was not a total loss, however. While writing some newspaper articles, I was privileged to speak with several pro wrestling stars and promoters. Respecting their situation, I, of course, did not debate them about pro wrestling's "reality" nor pump them for "trade secrets." Scraps of information were obtained about the inside world of pro wrestling, though, and a good deal of educated observation was made of TV shows and live matches.

Let it please be stressed that the following article is not offered as an "expose" of a "fake." It is written with deep respect for what pro wrestlers do and what they go through to present this unique form of stage combat.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

What organized sport has a longer pedigree than wrestling? Its ancient and global history need not be recounted here, as it has been exhaustively written about in sports books and general references. Suffice it to say that even before the classic Greco-Roman period, artisans decorated the walls of an Egyptian tomb with murals depicting sport wrestling techniques still familiar today, and that every pre-industrial peoples, from Tibetans to the American Plains Indians, have had grappling as a combat sport.

Of main interest to us is wrestling as a major sports spectacle of late nineteeth century and early twentieth century Europe and America. In an era of famous strong men, wrestling professionals were true sports superstars. American Frank Gotch, George Hackenschmidt the Russian Lion, Gama of India, Zbyszco of Poland—these names were probably as familiar in their time as Julius Erving, Reggie Jackson and John McEnroe are today. Wrestling became established in this period as a popular box office attraction.

So what transformed professional wrestling from being a legitimate, bruisingly contested sport to an entertainment where the bruises come from rough choreography? It is my hypothesis that long, evenly matched bouts—Gama and Zbyszco's first meeting lasted two hours and thirty four minutes in 1910 and was declared a draw because of darkness—began to make the sport more and more boring in a faster paced modern era dawning with the 1920s and 30s (it is interesting to note that six-day bicycle races and extended speed walking competitions also declined in popularity at this time).[6] As radio coverage of sports grew, long wrestling bouts could not produce the excitement of blow-by-blow boxing or play-by-play baseball, nor could it be counted on to fit neatly into a predetermined time frame.

It is likely that spectacular action (including punching and kicking), unexpected turns of fortune, dramatic finales and colorful personalities were seen by promoters as ways to boost flagging public interest.[7]

Ironically, when television arrived in the late 1940s and early 1950s to challenge radio, it found all this flamboyant mayhem to be just right for the video tube, hungry for visuals. It is a little noted fact of entertainment history that the late wrestling star Gorgeous George was nearly as well known an early TV personality as Milton Berle.[8] Today, Hulk Hogan, Dusty Rhodes, et al are easily major TV stars with followings to rival any others.

PRO WRESTLING'S STAGE

Pro wrestling has abandoned a raised mat area with a circle competition zone in favor of "the squared circle"—the boxing ring (perhaps another indication of its need to compete with its pugilistic sister sport). As will be discussed below, this "stage" has determined much of pro wrestling's approach to fight choreography.

Smaller rings are used for touring shows that appear in high school gyms and small community halls. Larger professional boxing rings used in big arenas (to these may be added high chain-link fencing on all sides for sensational "steel cage" matches). There is an additional layer of plastic foam padding under these rings' mats. I examined one traveling ring before a show and noted a large spring in the center underneath, hidden from audience view.

Despite the padding and spring loading, pro wrestlers still take a great deal of real punishment and must learn how to fall. Sprains, bruises, fractures and other injuries are not uncommon.

In terms of being a "set," the ring has allowed a great number of possibilities in combat choreography. Wrestlers can bounce off ropes, be thrown through them, be choked with them or even have their eyes rubbed along them (a tactic reserved for the most dastardly of bad guys to use).

Some wrestlers smash their opponents into the corner turnbuckles. Some even leap from the upper most rungs where the ropes are connected to the corner posts. The corner post itself is sometimes used for forehead smashes.

The area around the ring is used to advantage for dramatic brawls. Spills and body slams out here really occur on concrete or hard wood. Again, pro wrestlers deserve credit for what they do.

Given the nature of the boxing ring as pro wrestling's "stage," with audience seating on all sides (both in floor level seats and in higher bleachers), it is immediately evident that pro wrestling is truly theatre-in-the-round—the most difficult theatre to stage any action for, particularly combat scenes.

Masking a punch on an upstage side, for example, is almost impossible. During matches taped for TV broadcast, wrestlers can take advantage of an "upstage" side created by a camera angle (the director in the control room will also select on a moment-to-moment basis those cameras whose position masks or reveals the action to best advantage). But the need for exciting close-ups can limit this tactic.

Thus the demands of pro wrestling's physical and electronic theatres—the challenges of theatre-in-the-round and TV close-up work—have caused much of pro wrestling fight choreography to evolve differently from what is taught by SAFD instructors and many other fight masters in theatre work.

PRO WRESTLING TECHNIQUES

Evidently, pro wrestlers must learn a repertoire of techniques that are common throughout the business.[9] There are in fact pro wrestling schools that teach the basics. These are apparently pretty modest in their physical plants and maintain a low profile. For example, a wrestling star of the 1940s runs one in a small Boston gym, and there is one in an old airplane hangar in southern New Jersey. A current major wrestling star told the author, in reply to a question about how wrestlers train, that he was encouraged by a former military buddy who had taken up wrestling. He was astonished, he recalled, to find the wrestling camp's main gym in the barn of an old farm, its small ring lit by a bare bulb.

Tuition, reportedly, can be two or three thousand dollars at these schools, but besides getting the required skills, students apparently make necessary job contacts too. I am unsure whether such schools are all independent, affiliated formally or informally with wrestling promoters, or a combination. Apparently wrestling organizations do have their own exercise and practice gymnasiums for stars under contract.

This leads to an important point. Based on what the I have seen and on my own experience in fight choreography, important wrestling matches presented in major areas or for large audience TV broadcasts are well rehearsed prior to their presentation. Improvisation is kept at a minimum. These matches can be fast moving, action filled and comparatively safe for the combatants.

By contrast, matches in the smaller local shows,which feature touring wrestlers, are made up pretty much on the spot. There simply isn't enough time to choreograph every fight thoroughly as one does for a show running in the theatre.

One revealing moment for me came at a local school where a pro wrestling card was to appear one evening. In the parking lot, I overheard a wrestler ask a member of the touring tech crew, "Who's on the card tonight?" After shows are contracted between the wrestling organizations and the local promoters, wrestlers are given schedules of where and when to show up. They frequently don't know who they're billed against, let alone have time to rehearse a ten minute fight.[10]

Improvisation during fight action in the theatre is a dangerous practice because of the potential for injury. Indeed, pro wrestling matches that have apparently had little prior rehearsal will have slower moves and more interruptions in the action (while the principals argue, gesture, play to the crowd). This gives more safety and control as well as breathing space.

At the small shows, visitors are required to clear the locker room at least one hour before show time. During this hour the on-site promoter (a wrestling organization representative, perhaps a former wrestler himself, who serves as "director" and should not be confused with the local promoter, the community person who contracted the show with the wrestling organization) will gather the participants. Beginnings and endings for each match are worked out under the on-site promoter's direction.

This allows the wrestlers some needed structure as they improvise before large (and frequently critical) crowds. It also keeps the action within the current characterizations and "plot lines" of the wrestling organization.

To fully appreciate pro wrestling, it is absolutely necessary to understand that each show—live or televised—is not a random group of matches, but a collection of on-going rivalries, feuds and, indeed, plot twists. A big reason for pro wrestling's longevity is that fans tune in week after week to see what's going to happen next.[11]

In addition, combat techniques are employed that fit the character. A good guy American may use a groin kick if he's been at the receiving end of a bad

guy Russian's dirty tactics. But only the worst villains will repeatedly use eye pokes, chokes or hair grabs. Fitting the action to the character is thoroughly consistent with good theatrical fight choreography.

Close work down on the mat or close standing grappling against the ropes allows each wrestler to quietly communicate with his "opponent" about what the next series of actions will be. This is usually a cooperative effort and both give imput. During a match, Wrestler A will certainly execute throws, tosses, and whips on Wrestler X. So each must know what the other will be doing as the roles of thrower and throwee are exchanged.

Does each wrestling organization have its own techniques or protocols for improvisation? Probably not. Since so many wrestlers go from one organization to another, wrestling in different parts of the country during their careers, there must be "industry standards."

I have noticed times when one wrestler will slap another's arm or shoulder—with an open hand, rhythmically and not especially hard—prior to a throw or a whip across the ring. This may be part of a regular code, but I have no confirmation of this.

Fight Masters who have dealt with uncooperative actors may wonder if wrestlers ever disregard their instructions? Apparently it happens, but only rarely. A former co-worker of mine told me his great uncle had been a pro wrestler years back. Tired of it all, he overpowered his opponent and pinned him so that the referee had no choice but to administer the three count.[12] Of course, my acquaintance's great uncle was black-balled from pro wrestling after that. A local promoter once told me that after one match the show was delayed because of an altercation in the changing room. One wrestler heatedly accused his opponent of not cooperating on an agreed action, and the other wrestlers had to separate them in the ensuing scuffle.

From time to time amateur freestyle wrestling techniques, such as spin outs and leg takedowns, are used in pro wrestling matches. In one notable example, TV and movie star Mr. T used legitimate amateur sport wrestling moves at the outset of his WWF "Wrestlemania" main event match (which probably helped make his involvement in a pro wrestling extravaganza seem more legitimate as well).

However, the rest of the moves are an amalgamation of fighting techniques. Let us consider these separately in terms of holds, throws, blows and weapons.

As with all good combat mime, pro wrestling holds are modified to eliminate danger to the holdee while giving credibility to the holder's actions. The element of "selling" the action is obviously very important. Consider a rear choke hold in mat work in which A wraps his right arm around X's neck and grasps his right wrist with his left hand to cinch the hold. X's throat will fit into the crook of A's arm, allowing X to breathe. X will grimace, A will flex his biceps, and it appears that a desperate struggle is going on.

To effectively use an arm bar in actual combat, combatant A must maintain pressure against the outside of combatant X's elbow in a lever and fulcrum action. In pro wrestling, A maintains the fulcrum pressure against the inside of X's elbow. A's sudden movements will not hyperextend X's elbow joint, but proper facial expressions and even vocalizations sell the action.

It should be noted that long term exposure to even choreographed head locks and choke holds take their toll on pro wrestlers. Repeated irritation, breakage and rehealing of fibrocartilage of the outer ear results in the ear's deformation and stiffening, the famous "cauliflower ear."

Many leg locks, arm locks and twists, and restraints are apparently performed in a "real" manner, but not applied to injure. The mutual "selling" is important, but the potential for injury is real.

Hair grabs are of interest. These are actual grabs, not the closed fist laid on the head mime often taught in stage combat. Long, flowing hair is virtually required for women wrestlers so that hair grabs can be emphasized in the choreography. The spectacle of a hair grabbing "cat fight" seems firmly established, for better or worse, in women's pro wrestling. When a throw is combined with the hair grab, the throwee must execute the action or ride with it, or else be scalped.

Pro wrestling probably has its greatest technical concordance with standard stage combat in the matter of throws. The throwee seems to execute most of the actual move, while the "thrower" sells the action. Having the throwee control and execute the action is most noticeable—and most important—when the throwee goes out of the ring onto the hard floor.

Pro wrestlers use many of the breakfall techniques advocated in judo and other martial arts. Throwees will slap the mat hard to absorb the shock if landing on their side. When landing on their backs, throwees will arch the back to protect the spine. They will also try to land their shoulders and feet simultaneously to distribute the impact. In a technique such as a body slam, it is important for the thrower to throw light and sell big.

Pro wrestling employs a variety of throws, body slams, suplexes, "pile drivers", and atomic drops." Many of these moves are simple when the proper balance point of the throwee's body is used to set up the technique. However, many of these still require great strength, particularly in lower back muscles (which are easily strained if not properly conditioned or if heavy lifts become unbalanced). In addition, the thrower must usually position and support the throwee so as not to cause neck or spine injuries. Most TV wrestling shows use slow motion replay when such a throw has been used as the coup-de-grace, so viewers knowledgeable in stage combat may readily discern the techniques involved after a few viewings.

A variation on throws is when the thrower throws himself. Popular Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka executes his famous coup-de-grace leap from the top ropes on a prone opponent. Some wrestlers will leap from the top ropes into the arms of a standing opponent and come crashing down in an automatic, victorious pin. Both types of flamboyant flying require that the wrestler on the receiving end be positioned correctly. Knee pads are absolutely required for the flier, as is a lot of practice. This blow with the whole body leads to the matter of blows with the hands, feet, elbows.

As noted above, pro wrestling has to deal with the dual challenges of theatre-in-the-round and close-up camera work. Although not unknown, it is rare for blows to be directed safely off to the upstage side of the person who is struck at, or against a nearby but less vulnerable part of the body. Unlike most methods of safe combat mime, where blows are directed to one side of the target, many pro wrestling blows are directed at the target and then pulled.

The above statement should be qualified however. Kicks, punches or elbows to the mid-section, arms or upper back are apparently believed to involve a target that is naturally less vulnerable (than, say, the face) and which may even be conditioned by exercise to toughen it against impacts. Light or medium contact is sometimes made against "safer" areas. Punches to the face or jaw are often directed in a downward hooking motion that will impact the punch, if contact is accidentally made, against the upper chest.

To my eye, it also appears that the person on the receiving end usually begins to give the impact reaction before the technique "lands." The reaction seems to entail not only a jerking back, but a turning away as well. This is particularly noticeable with the famous pro wrestling drop kicks to the head. Blows are telegraphed to the audience (and to the other combatant) as in standard combat mime, but instead of the puncher/kicker directing the blow off target, the punchee/kickee moves the target away and/or slightly to the side. Head butts seem to be handled with a similar early rebound on the part of the buttee. With good timing on both wrestlers' parts and a slight slowing of the motion, safety and the appearance of reality are achieved in a compromise.

This is noticeable in the "clothesline," which is a strike using the inside of the forearm. As two wrestlers rush toward each other, passing shoulder to shoulder, the smasher will extend his arm to the side and catch the smashee across the chest (Sgt. Slaughter uses this to great effect as "the Slaughter Cannon," usually following up with his "Cobra Clutch" choke hold). As the smashee takes the strike, he pulls his shoulders back, throws his feet out and up, and goes down on his back in a most spectacular manner. The impact is taken across the muscles of the chest but is largely reduced by the pull back and fall.

Chops to the throat are actually directed at the top of the chest. A loud "knap" or sound effect is often made too by the impact, and it must sting (see below on knaps).

Stomping a downed opponent may involve a direct flat footed stomp on the mat next to the stompee's head (the alleged target). Stomping between head and shoulder gives a partial mask to the movement. Against an arm or leg, the stomper's heel may make impact first, with the foot bent back up to minimize actual contact.

Knaps are not unknown in pro wrestling. One notorious—pretty obvious—technique while throwing a punch is for the puncher to lean back on his rear leg, then bring the front foot down hard on the mat at the moment the punch "lands." Interestingly, pro wrestlers are getting more subtle about using this one.

In general, to get as much knap and realism as possible, pro wrestlers are willing to take punches, chops, elbows, knees and kicks of medium power upon those parts of the body (mid section, arms) naturally "padded" by muscle. Although many pro wrestlers may wear exotic costumes to the ring, the trunks they wear while wrestling do not allow the type of strategic padding often used in theatrical fight costuming.

Probably the ultimate pro wrestling knap comes when a wrestler impacts the mat after a spectacular throw. I was told that in large arenas, an extra microphone is placed under the ring to amplify these impacts. I once attended a card at Madison Square Garden and sat in nearly the last row of the upper balcony.

Indeed, you could hear every throw via the house sound system. Rather than laughing at this as a bit of acoustic trickery, the reader ought to realize that the tactile sensation of the spectacle would be lost if most of the ticket buyers had to rely on visual impact alone. Again, pro wrestling is a well presented form of theatre.

Weapons are theoretically illegal in pro wrestlinq, but of course are well established props. There does seem to be some use of break away chairs in the major, well rehearsed shows. Bad guy manager Freddie Blassie has handed his cane on many occasions to a villainous protege for nefarious mischief involving the hero's noggin. Invariably, the blow comes from behind (it's a sneak attack, of course), and lands on one side of the good guy's upper back. The head of the cane breaks away over the hero's shoulder dramatically (and fairly safely—this is usually done on one edge of the ring, and there's enough distance that the pieces won't land in the audience).

When chairs are used in improvisational situations, the attacker will allow the victim to crowd him enough so that any swinging power is minimized and any blow lands on the less sensitive back.

Occasionally, there will be choking actions using belts, costumes or ring ropes. These can be tricky as the material does go around the throat. Apparently a combination of the muscular, well developed necks of most wrestlers, the victim's fingers being allowed to get in between neck and material, and the careful application of the "strangle" provide the safety margin. By most fight choreography standards, this would be an unacceptable margin.

Are injuries caused by using these combat mime methods? Of course. I witnessed one live tag team match that was stopped by the referee when one wrestler was struck in the forehead and sunk to his knees stunned. From the referee's and the wrestler's reactions, it was not part of the "script." However the number of injuries caused by blows seems to be surprisingly small. I have seen more wrestlers leave the ring with genuine limps after hard throws.

A great deal has been made of the matter of "juice"—blood streaming from the heads of wrestlers. Although blood packs hidden in the hair are apparently used, real blood is frequently employed.

The hair and scalp are nourished by thousands of tiny capillaries. A rather minor cut to the scalp will bleed profusely (this fact is taught to first aid trainees and ambulance crewpersons—a great deal of blood from the scalp may not necessarily mean a serious head injury if the victim is fully conscious). Pro wrestlers have been known to conceal small razors in their wrestling costumes or about the ring to cut themselves surreptitiously.[13]

Contrary to popular media notion, however, the practice is not widespread. Bloodshed seems to be reserved for the larger arena shows (particularly in the South, for some reason), and is virtually never seen on national television programs or at smaller local shows, both of which are usually aimed at audiences of children or families.

AFTERWORD

Although I have reported on pro wrestling fight methods, no endorsement should be inferred by the reader. As noted earlier, many of these methods would be quite unacceptable to SAFD choreographers due to their high potential for injury.

In addition, I may be wrong about some things or may have missed important aspects of pro wrestling fight choreography. I hope more experienced members of the SAFD will undertake studies of pro wrestling for this reason.

Much can be learned from pro wrestling's sense of character definement, projection, fight pacing and its overall sense of theatre. These elements are as crucial to memorable and successful combat mime sequences as actual blows and throws.

Pro wrestling has survived and now even thrives. Its fans are in the millions, and they are intensely loyal.[14]

ANNOTATIONS

1. Both quoted in Joe Jares, *Whatever Happened to Gorgeous George? (The Blood and Ballyhoo of Professional Wrestling),* Prentice Hall Books, 1974. Mr. Jares, a former *Sports Illustrated* writer now working for a Los Angeles newspaper, is the son of a professional wrestler who toured actively in the 1940s and 1950s. The book manages to be honest, funny and appreciative of pro wrestling all at once. An indispensable work for those interested in this type of entertainment, it's worth finding at a library if it's not currently in print.

2. Also quoted in Jares' book, from Variety publication sources. I have been unable to get current figures, but I suspect that his are not inaccurate.

3. Based on Nielsen TV rating information for New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles. Although I couldn't quote exact figures (this privilege is reserved for Nielsen service subscribers), a woman in their New York office did look up the information and confirm it for me over the phone.

4. Dave Meltzer, publisher of the *Wrestling Observer,* summed up the situation for *Sports Illustrated* (April 29, 1985). "The TV ratings have been good for the last ten years, but when (World Wrestling Federation head Vince) McMahon started bragging about them, suddenly people began to notice. Then you started to hear, 'Wow they're selling out the (New York Madison Square) Garden every month.' Well, wrestling has been selling out the Garden every month for the past fifteen years."

5. *TV Guide* did offer to look at such an article, but warned me no one had had much success with a wrestling piece in the past. They returned mine with a nice note saying the piece wasn't "revealing enough." I had promised those I interviewed that I wasn't writing a flip article about this "low brow" entertainment and how it's all "fake." *TV Guide* managing editor R.C. Smith (no relation) eventually was forced to do an article himself, entitled "Prime-Time Viewers, Beware—Rowdy Roddy and the Hulkster Want You!" (August 3, 1985).

6. Paul M. Boesch, president of Best of Texas Wrestling, Houston, informs me that there were plenty of two and even three hour matches in the 1930-35 period, and a nine hour match back in the 20s (letter, 22 July 1984). Mr. Boesch, a war hero, poet and former wrestler (pro and amateur), is credited with popularizing tag teams and mud wrestling. He is also known as a fine gentleman in a business where competition has become (if you'll pardon the expression) no-holds-barred.

7. To confirm or deny this hypothesis, one could spend some time checking newspaper files from this period to see just when sports page coverage of professional wrestling championships ceased (as it obviously did at some point) and whether there were any complaints by sports reporters of matches being fixed prior to that point.

8. Gorgeous George—a "heel" or villain who was the first to wear long wavy blond hair, perfume and beautiful robes into the ring and adopt a preening air—was a real pioneer of modern wrestling as theatre. He also had a significant impact on boxing in an amusing way. His verbal ballyhoo during interviews was something like "I am the greatest! I am the prettiest! If this guy musses my hair up Saturday night, I'll kill him!" This routine had quite an effect on a young boxer named Cassius Clay who went with his brother to see George when he wrestled in Louisville. As Muhammed Ali later observed in tribute to his great stylistic influence, "People hated this guy, always wanting to see him get killed. But it always sold the house out."

9. There are three main wrestling organizations. The oldest, the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) is based in the South; the American Wrestling Association (AWA) which was later founded in the MidWest; and the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), which finally came to control the East Coast. Unlike professional boxing, no organized crime figures have ever been involved with the pro wrestling business, that I've ever heard, but the organizations' division of the country prior to 1984 was almost Mafiaesque! However, after the death of Vince McMahon (who had firmly established the WWF as a wrestling power), and with the publicity garnered by the "rock and wrestling connection," his son Vince McMahon, Jr. began to invade his rivals' audience turf, first via cable TV and later with live shows. The NWA and AWA responded by allying to form Pro Wrestling USA to pool their best stars in a counter effort while still retaining their regular shows.

There are interesting differences in their approaches to pro wrestling as theatre and stage combat, although the actual fight techniques are nearly identical. The WWF specializes in spectacles usually involving outrageously costumed personalities. Its TV productions are definitely slicker and more professional. Pro Wrestling USA does an okay job imitating this approach. However, the NWA and AWA programs go for less spectacle and more wrestling. Overall, their fights are more interesting because they are generally faster moving. Also, their fights don't involve as many one-sided "mismatches" between major stars and minor "set-up" opponents, hence they have more drama.

10. However, a supply and demand problem may be dooming the small shows. A local promoter tells me the major organizations won't tie up a lot of their big names at a small one thousand seat show in a high school gym any more when they could be taping TV programs or appearing in big arenas. There are "minor league" type circuits of wrestlers, but these don't have the box office draw associated with television exposure and are strictly for the most fanatic of fanatical wrestling fans. Perhaps if the current TV demand shrinks because the current wrestling fad fades, these wonderful one nighters—where you can watch the pros work close up and in person—will come back.

However, it's a hard life on the road for the wrestlers, who apparently must pay their own expenses and get no pensions or insurance. The down side is, there's no SAC, AFTRA or Equity for pro wrestlers.

11. This is true in the same way that continuing day time TV dramas (aka "soap operas") might seem like just a bunch of people arguing or making love, unless you follow the shows and watch relationships and plots develop.

12. A word about referees. Pro wrestling bouts must be licensed by state athletic commissions which appoint referees for the evening, just as with boxing. However, the ring announcer always introduces "this *exhibition* of wrestling, licensed by the state of," (emphasis mine). Apparently, there's an agreement here. The referees are strictly wrestling referees and they're part of the show too, but it's not licensed as a sports competition. There are also ring doctors in attendance. Upon looking over a few of them, I'm not sure if I'd want to be a seriously injured wrestler with these guys as the nearest medical aid!

13. It would be interesting to find out if there's extra pay for "juice." There ought to be.

14. Besides its being faked and being hokey, another fashionable criticism of pro wrestling is its alleged racism, xenophobia and appeals to simple minded patriotism (battles involving flag waving Americans versus brutish Russians or nasty Iranians/Arabs are big today—in the 1940s sadistic Germans and sneaky Japanese were the prime foreign villains). But let it be noted here that pro wrestling programs are the only shows on television where not only blacks but Hispanics, Poles, Italians, American Indians, Pacific Islanders and other ethnic types are featured regularly and in heroic roles. This is probably a result of business savvy on the promoter's parts, but it compares strikingly with the rest of television.

WEAPON NOTES

by Michael Cawelti

Throughout the centuries those whose lives depended on edged weapons have sought the finest equipment they could obtain. While the finest weapon didn't necessarily make the finest warrior (the great Musashi found a wooden sword suited his purpose as well as its razor-sharp counterpart), no experienced man-at-arms would willingly taunt Fate by carrying inferior weapons.

Even in the "civilized" life at Court, where courtiers wore their sparkling swords as jewelry, the possibility of having to use it to defend one's life was very real, and blades were of the finest construction available.

The prestige of a Toledo, or Wilkenson blade was due more to functional excellence than outward aesthetics.

The fight director today no less depends on the fight worthiness of his equipment. Nothing could be more disruptive to a performance, or more dangerous to an actor, audience or set than a blade broken in the heat of battle. Also, as most rep companies haven't the good fortune to draw from the National Defense Budget for their weapons, blades and hilts must last through many productions.

Yet, fight directors, like most industrious folk, seem little satisfied with the status quo. Durability is not enough. While the cronies of Errol Flynn might have been oblivious to swashing chrome-plated cup hilts on a sixteenth century pirate ship, today's fighting styles and weapons have been steered to a more historically accurate course.

Yet, the problem for the fight director/combatant today is the same as that of the sixteenth century mercenary—where to find a blade that will stand up in action (and look period), that one doesn't have to sell the family jewels to afford.

The traditional epee fencing blade neither approximates the look or feel of a rapier blade, nor is it designed to be used in a cut and slash manner. There are other French and German blades commonly available, which are closer in weight and design, yet still don't match that distinctive rapier profile. There are also Spanish blades (broadsword and rapier) which look great, but alas, the heyday of Toledo steel is sadly behind us, and most of these are better suited to a study wall than meeting a sturdy parry onstage.

I have seen beautifully made broadsword and rapier blades available through armories in England, Germany and here in the U.S.; exact in design and stalwart in use, yet these are generally of the hand-crafted type, and accordingly expensive. They are fine for those who can afford them, but for the beginning combatant, or the theatre faced with outfitting *The Three Musketeers* from scratch, such finery might be beyond their reach.

So, the problem of a combat-worthy, historically accurate blade at a mass produced price was brought to me by the local weapons supplier. They had a manufacturer they could trust it seemed, but they lacked a design. As my work in the theatre includes design and fashioning of custom weapons, hilts, and scabbards, and as I had studied weapon design and construction in England, I drew up plans for two broadsword blades, which were sent with a request for a sample of a rapier blade which the manufacturer already had available.

The single (hand and a half) broadsword blade and the rapier arrived in July. The broadsword weighed two and a quarter pounds, was thirty-four and three quarters inches from the shoulder of the blade to the point, and featured a "cannalure," or blood groove running down the forte, half the length of the blade. The rapier was of a "rounded diamond" cross-section, three quarters inch wide at the shoulder, tapering to a half inch just before the point. This featured "opposing cannalures" (a unique design with the blood grooves running down seven eights the length of the blade—off center). In addition, the rapier (a heavyweight at fourteen ounces) was a traditionally more accurate thirty-seven inches in length (an epee is only thirty four inches).

Both were moderately more expensive than the standard European fare presently available, but were much more authentic in weight and design. But, of course, the real test would be how well they held up in combat.

The timing of their arrival was fortunate in that I was directing the fights for the Berkeley Shakespeare Festival's summer productions of *Richard III* and *Two Noble Kinsmen.* I used the broadswords for the Richmond/Richard fight in *Richard III* and the rapiers for the Paloman/Arcite duel in *Two Noble Kinsmen.*

The broadswords wore out some arms during rehearsals (being heavier than the standard Spanish blades), but gave a good "weighty" quality to the fight (performed in heavy felt armor). The blade's edges nicked about the same as the Spanish ones, but held their shape (lateral straightness), their temper, and resisted corrosion better (and corrosion is a factor in outdoor rep). One reason for better resistance to rust was the highly polished finish on the blades (which picked up the light beautifully). Another pleasing attribute was their "sound." An often heard audience comment was, "how did you get those swords to 'ring' like that?" They were mounted in solid steel hilts with oak handles, and they literally rang like church bells.

The rapiers did not ring as well but the nicking of edges was almost non-existant (and with proper filing was so). Also, the blades held their temper well and picked up light much better than conventional blades. The fighters also preferred the more historical balance point of four and a half inches from the shoulder.

All in all the blades tested to be very combat-worthy, historically accurate in design and weight, and pleasingly affordable. The broadsword blade is called the "super" (broadsword) blade, and the rapier goes by the name of the "cannalure." The blades, prices and other information are available from American Fencers Supply in San Francisco.

SO YOU WANT TO BE IN PICTURES?

by David Boushey

I recently choreographed some fights and did a number of stunts in the Dino de Laurentiis film *Blue Velvet* with Dennis Hopper, Hope Lange, Kyle MacLachlan, and Isabella Rossellini in North Carolina.

Overall, it was quite a successful experience but there were some disappointments. The disappointments were the fights and stunts that had to be cut due to a lack of time, which is a common occurrence in the film industry. Mr. de Laurentiis said "not a day more" and that was that! When it comes time to drop the axe, it is often the stunts that take it in the neck. This is often due to the fact that stunts can often be complicated and the amount of time to shoot them can be significant. If you are doing a punch-up, a couple of punches is much easier to set-up for than a real block buster which is of course what I had hoped to do, but so go the best laid plans. I might also add that the director of the film, David Lynch, who is a first rate director, is much more into psychological violence than overt violence. I would like to have seen him opt for more physicalization of the violent moments, of which there were many in this film. With its R rating for violence and nudity along with its Fellini approach, you will either be enthralled by this film or you will walk out half way through it; there will be no in-between.

I did a lot of stunt driving which was a new opportunity for me. My mentor, Dick Langdon (the stunt coordinator) taught me well, and though I can't say that I would like to do an end over end with an auto, I certainly can get by with some basic driving. I have done many other stunts in other films but cars were a whole new ball game and I hope that any of my colleagues considering the stunt game will take this aspect of stunting very seriously because you don't always know what a car is going to do especially if you intend to roll or flip one.

I have been gearing myself towards film for some time and I intend to do more in the future. Sometimes I feel I am getting a little too old for stunting but if you keep yourself in fairly good shape and don't take silly risks you can go well into your forties as a stuntman. I met many stuntmen who are seasoned veterans and have found that the average age for most stuntmen is around the mid thirties. One would assume much younger, but it takes a number of years to perfect your skills just as it does in fight choreography for the stage. No matter what business you are in, it takes time! Most stunt coordinators won't even look at you unless you have many years and credits to your name.

I have always been fascinated by special effects. It is incredible what the special effects people can do; especially how they can make a dummy look just like a real person. We had to shoot Dennis Hopper through the forehead in the film . The use of a little putty and foam rubber went a long way in making the scene look graphically real. We had great fun getting blown away with squibs which are the percussion caps laid on your everyday condom filled with stage blood that explode when ignited through an electrical charge. They can look so real when well executed but it can be dangerous in the hands of a novice.

The amount of sitting around can be frustrating! In the theatre we are so used to working all the time. To wait and wait and wait can drive you up a wall but if you intend to do films, you had better get used to it and learn to stay away from the crafts wagon which is loaded with food that keeps beckoning you to indulge yourself and may cause you to gain some weight. And when you put the stunt pads on, you look like a porker and when you are supposed to be doubling for a guy who weighs about one hundred forty five pounds soaking wet, and you look like he has suddenly developed a goiter.

I think you will enjoy the film when it comes out next summer. Know that I did a lot of the basic driving and that cop around on the set is yours truly. Yes. I got to do a litt1e acting also.

Now for the best part. They are doing another major feature film this spring and there is a very good chance I will be involved with the film as fight arranger and stuntman. I approached the producer and promoted the SAFD, emphasizing what a gold mine they had in all these trained people who had great physical abilities and who could be available when a big action film came to the fore (which is often the case at the de Laurentiis studio). The producer was very excited about the prospects and suggested that I collect resumes from the membership. Here is an opportunity for the SAFD to get into films if you are interested. Please submit to me your resume and picture (in triplicate) if you are interested in being considered for the film this March. Please note whether or not you are SAG (it doesn't matter, and in fact can work more for you if you are not). North Carolina is a right-to-work state and that is where the Dino de Laurentiis studios are. When you send your three resumes, please indicate any specialties you have. It could be anything such as juggling, fire-eating, martial arts, tight-rope walking, anything that could be of value to a stunt coordinator on a film. Submit your resumes to me by *March 1st.* Those that come after that date will not be considered for the film. It says something to a stunt coordinator if a person is indifferent about making deadlines. It means he cannot be relied upon when a specific time is given to accomplish a particular deed.

It is time that we pursued the film industry more. A lot of films are made in foreign countries which is a real source of frustration, but we should be getting involved with this aspect of the entertainment industry. Steven Spielberg is producing *Peter Pan* this summer in England. It is so frustrating when you know you would stand a great chance at being involved in a project and then you find that you are not only competing with your colleagues in this country but your colleagues internationally! Yet there are still jobs for us in the film industry and believe me, the money is right!

Send your resumes in triplicate to: David Boushey, 4720 38th NE, Seattle, Washington 98105.

FROM GOOD TO BAD IN SHAKESPEARE AND SHERIDAN

A week-end with Ian McKay, Senior Fight Master and co-founder of the Society of British Fight Directors, prompted a trip to Stratford-upon-Avon where I had the pleasure of seeing *As You Like It* and *Othello,* performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Mr. McKay directed the fights in both plays.

In *As You Like It,* the classic wrestling match between Orlando and the Duke's wrestler, Charles, was pleasantly refreshing, humorous, and well-timed. It had all the thrilling back-breaking and arm-twisting moves expected in any "big time wrestling match." But there came a point when Charles was bear-hugging Orlando, squeezing the life out of him, and Orlando's endless clap on the ears didn't have the usual effect. This left Orlando with one choice, and, holding Charles' face in his hands, he proceeded to plant a sloppy smooch right on the old kisser. Charles' consternation and humiliation was too much for him to overcome, and Orlando finished him off soon after.

Othello was played on a black and white set, costumes the same. It was nice to see all the actors treat their weapons with respect, as if indeed they were extensions of their arms. The fight sequence between Roderigo-Cassio-Iago was brilliantly done in very dim side-lighting, allowing the audience to see only what appeared to be great caped figures committing grotesquely sinister deeds. The build-up to Iago's suicide was rivetingly portrayed by Ben Kingsly, and the stabbing was a rightful shock to end the play.

At the National Theatre Malcolm Ranson directed the fight sequence in R.B. Sheridan's *The Critic* with grandiose style. A very comical fight, every cut, thrust, and parry was delivered in time with the orchestra, keeping beat with the music. The precision and reactions of the combatants made this work excellent.

Claude Carliez choreographed the climactic clash of Macbeth and Macduff in a production of *Macbeth* at the Comedie-Francaise in Paris. Unfortunately, it was quite *anti*-climactic. The sound of the swords put me off to begin with. Using quasi- S-shaped broadswords I could have believed, given the director's concept, but once the blades met it sounded more like wood or cheap tin than deadly steel. The sequence was weakly supported by both actors and concentration was minimal. Twice (at least) I could see the choreography was dropped and a new beginning made. It was slow, unbelievable, hesitant, and sloppy. A real shame, in view of the rest of the play, which was very well done. All was not lost. However, the audience roared when Macbeth was killed in a poorly masked under-the-arm thrust. Then came a blackout as Macduff raised his sword to behead the fallen King. Better to have blacked out this fight!

The Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, Scotland, set their *Hamlet* in the post World War I era. The play was quite good, and most of the ending "contest" was well directed by Denis Agnew. It was much too short, however, and was over before the audience had a chance to become involved and enjoy it. The speed was unnecessarily fast, causing the fight to look very choreographed and a bit "cute." The second hit was beautifully done when Laertes charged the Prince. Hamlet executed a demi-volte, swung his rapier round his body, behind his back, and scored on Laertes back as he passed. In general, the fight was good, but very easily could have been excellent. Why settle for less?

Kerry James

CHINESE WEAPONS

Chinese Weapons by E.T.C. Werner, Ohara Publication Inc., Los Angeles, California 1972.

Mr. Werner's book covers the history of Chinese weaponry with the arms, and all the reference sources are in both Chinese and English. This feature is helpful, particularly when pursuing your own research. *Chinese Weapons* covers the usual weaponry, but also adds a section on seige-craft weapons and their role in Chinese military campaigns. The discovery and evolution of firearms from fire archer, to the Mounted Fo-Lang Cannon are discussed and illustrated in this text. For the costumier, the history and construction of armour and shields are also covered. Dimensions, materials and applications are given for all weapons. Because of the thoroughness in which the wide range of topics is covered, Mr. Werner's book is an excellent resource guide.

David Sollars

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

My good friend David Leong has informed me that the National Fight Workshop of 1985 promoted the use of "buttonless rapier blades" in classwork and performance situations.

To say that removing the button and grinding the blade to a blunt point increases the sense of danger between combatants is laughably true. Novice combatants may now cross the line from healthy respect to honest fear of the weapons they wield. Which is the better aid to teaching, fear or respect?

I must agree that in most performance situations, the button is quite visible to some of the audience. Those who do see the button seldom stand up and cry "Fake!", but indeed they are more inclined to ignore it as they would ignore the absence of blood oozing from a dying Mercutio.

The button on the end of a foil, sabre, or epee blade does offer a fair amount of protection. Consider the difference between having your toe smashed by the heel of a man's shoe and having the same toe smashed by a woman's spike heel. The lighter weight lady is likely to do a great deal more damage to your toe than the clumsy gentleman, because her weight is distributed over a smaller area. That is basic physics and it can be mathematically proven. The principle is the same with our rapiers.

Aesthetically, I am in total agreement with the Fight Masters in saying it looks better to show the audience a truly dangerous looking weapon. However, I urge everyone to consider carefully the ability of your student or actor before putting one of these modified stage weapons in their hand.

If the choreographer determines that the audience will be too far away to detect the offensive little bugger, why not use the extra protection offered by the button?

It makes me very angry that our Society has the concept of safety written into its Consitution, and still our leaders can give an unqualified nod of approval to increasing the potential damage of an accident.

I have been teaching for only three years, but I am convinced that accidents do happen, and even the best combatants cannot change that.

Sincerely,
Charles Killian
Associate

As an Associate member of the Society since 1981 and as a student of both B.H. Barry and J. Alan Suddeth, I feel I must respond to Tony Soper's article ("We Have Met the Enemy, and He Is Us") in your September issue.

What disturbs me most is Mr. Soper's use of the Journal to create an "Us" vs. "Them" mentality with the SAFD (wearing the white hats) as "Us" and Barry and his students (wearing the black hats) as "Them." Whether or not that was his intention, that is the impression his article creates.

B.H. Barry is known and respected as a teacher and choreographer both in the United States and in Great Britain for good reason. He has been justifiably praised for his work in film (including Polanski's *Macbeth),* television (several of the B.B.C.'s Shakespeare plays among others), and on stage (Fight Master for the Royal Shakespeare Company and hundreds of productions both in England and here). As a teacher he has made significant contributions to stage combat in terms of both safety and aesthetics. I know from personal experience that he places great emphasis not only on safety, (one of the first things he mentioned in class was "fencing measure" and he had some of the best methods of teaching one how to find distance that I have seen), but also on building in the dramatics of the fight so that it becomes an integral part of the scene.

As far as parrying with the flat, Barry is on solid ground. If you look through *The Art and History of Personal Combat* by Arthur Wise, you will see several illustrations from the period showing examples of parrying with the flat, and in the areas of the world today where live blades are still used in actual combat you will see the same technique. I have been a practitioner of martial arts for eighteen years, the past eight of which I have taught and practiced Kali, the combat, bladed art of the Philippines. In combat you block the cutting edge of your enemy's blade primarily with the flat of your blade, or, with a single edged blade, occasionally the back is used. It does not take much logic, and only a minimal knowledge of actual combat, to figure out that if you do not use these techniques in battle you will soon have a useless weapon. I am aware that many other choreographers prefer using the edge for the stage and that is fine, but I think it is an unfortunate sign for the Society that Mr. Soper and the other SAFD fighters in the production had such difficulty adapting to this choreographer's way of doing things!

Making B.H. Barry the enemy is absurd. I have spoken to disgruntled performers from shows staged by some SAFD choreographers and were they to write articles they would be no more flattering than Mr. Soper's.

We all know that Barry has never wanted to be associated with the Society (Politics rears its ugly head) and that is his problem, but let's not lose sight of our goals. We are not trying to promote one way of doing things nor should our concern be who is the most commercially successful choreographer. The goal is to educate actors and develop higher standards of performance, things which both the Society and Barry and his students strive for.

Yours,
Martin LaPlatney

I applaud your comments in the September 1985 issue regarding the problems with the current certification process. Despite the excellent pointers given by David Leong in his article of the same issue (Teaching Stage Combat, Helpful Hints) I agree that the present certification configuration places those without imaginative or highly developed *choreographic* skills at an undue disadvantage. I think we'd all have to admit that it's sometimes easier to disguise a lack of talent, or ability on the part of a combatant by clever choreography, transitions or good acting choices. Comic fights are usually easier to stage for this reason. Who of us has not found himself choreographing to hide an actor's weaknesses, especially if he has few strengths to highlight?

But is the ability to create a scene that justifies all three weapon-styles, with transitions, full acting values *and* proper orchestration something we can reasonably expect of a prospective Actor/Combatant? Is it even desirable?

Is not Certification meant to represent that the Society affirms that anyone possessing it is capable of *executing,* with safety and professionalism, the fights given to him by a choreographer?

It may be that the only "fair" way of judging a combatant's *technical* mastery of certain testable skills is to include a "compulsory" fight which is the same for all. Of course, I believe we should allow for individual expression and creativity, but perhaps we could take a lesson from other athletic forms that are independently judged, and separate the creative elements from the technical ones (for purposes of Certification).

I'd like also to applaud K. Reed Needles for his excellent and useful article concerning scabbards. This is the kind of information that needs to be disseminated and discussed much, much more.

Finally, I note with some concern a shrill note sounded by some of the Fight Masters in the last issue. Only with sustained nurturing and guidance will the newer members of this Society grow and contribute and support thereby the growth of the art. From whom can they expect this guidance and support, if not from you?

Your students are your students. Responsibility for their further growth is yours, who else's? If you cut them loose, compete with them, denigrate them, hinder them instead of nurture, council, inspire and above all STAY WITH THEM, how can you blame them for disappointing you? Where else do you expect them to turn? A beaten dog will eventually bite the master it loves.

To answer the question asked in the last issue: What do we do with the monster we create? Love them, support them, help them, teach them, LEAD THEM.

Tony Soper

The thought occurred to me to design a curriculum that would prepare a person (already knowledgeable in the theatre) to enter the profession of fight directing for the stage. I decided upon the following courses:

History of the Masters of Defense
History of Fight Directing for Stage, T.V. and Film
Foil
Epee
Sabre
Historical Weaponry: Broadsword (with dagger, shield, buckler, axes, maces),
Pole Arms (Quarterstaff, pikes, partisan).
Rapier (with dagger, case of rapiers, with cloak).
Courtsword
Unarmed Combat
Choreography I: Unarmed and Contemporary Unarmed Combat
Choreography II: Medieval Weaponry
Choreography III: Renaissance Weaponry
Choreography IV: Restoration Weaponry
Choreography VI: Fights for the Ballet, Opera, Musical
Choreography VII: Comedic Fights and Slapstick
Teaching Stage Combat
The Psychology of Coaching/Teaching Actors
The Psychology of Communicating with the Production Staff
Directing for the Theatre
Apprenticeship

I imagine this entire sequence would most likely take several years to finish...at the least. My hope is that this last sentence instill a few thoughts into those would-be fight directors that try to sell themselves in this capacity after a single class in stage combat or even after taking the National Stage Combat Workshop.

Good fight directors are not in demand *only* because of the knowledge they possess about fighting techniques. They are recognized as masters at what they do largely because of how they work with people. There is a great deal of psychology involved in the direction and coaching of actors and this is something that often cannot be taught. So a word of caution to the young upstart who strolls into a professional theatre declaring that he is the next Fred Cavens, Patrick Crean or William Hobbs: Be wary of what you don't know about this business.

So, where does one learn the art of directing fights for the stage? Paddy Crean hopes that a return to the earlier days (when young actors apprenticed themselves to a company) might become the true way to learn. Following this tradition, the would be fight directors would apprentice themselves to a fight master in order to learn the trade. This process may take a few years. Most fight masters would probably welcome a person to assist them on jobs. And even though the meager task of notating fights may be all that is granted to the apprentice in the early stages (for little or no pay) there is no better way to learn than by watching the most experienced people work at their craft. Gradually, when one proves he can accept responsibility both in a managerial and artistic manner, his participation in the creative process will most likely be increased.

Unless one feels very competent in most of the areas mentioned above, consider studying further before assuming enough to promote yourself as a fight director. Doing so will only insure that when one *is* ready to enter the profession of fight directing, it will be done with confidence and assuredness. Unfortunately, many people suffer from the "Fast Food Syndrome" of wanting something right away. It takes many years of personal research, class technique and on-the-job training to become a true artist in any field. Be patient. If you can't be patient with yourself, how can you expect to be patient when teaching or coaching a group of professional actors?

David S. Leong

In both my fight rehearsals and my rapier and dagger classes at the Philadelphia College of Performing Arts, I am using high-impact safety glasses. Although I constantly stress facial safety through proper technique, I believe that these comfortable, light weight glasses are a valuable safety factor in the event of a mistake. My contract at school stipulates that my students are covered for any injury incurred in class provided the instructor takes "reasonable precautions." These glasses cost seven dollars per pair.

Charles Conwell

I would like to take this opportunity to air some differences of opinion and grievances.

My name is Bob Goodwin, and I teach T'ai Chi Ch'uan and stage combat for Webster University's Theatre Arts Department. My introduction to formal stage combat was through William Langfelder, an associate member who teaches mime, stage combat and T'ai Chi for Lindenwood College in St. Charles, Missouri. Mr. Bob Peffers was the Head of the Department of Theatre and Dance at Lindenwood. Dr. Peffers received his Doctorate in London from Sir Phillip Layton. In the spring of 1984, I was certified actor/combatant by Robin McFarquhar and Hollis Houston. I have since attended the Fifth Annual SAFD National Workshop in Salem, Massachusetts, and was again certified.

While my training from the SAFD is modest, I have studied various martial arts and oriental weapons for the past twenty years. Besides traditional Japanese weapons, I practice and teach Chinese staff, broadsword and short stick. I am also learning Kali from Dan Inosanto. I constantly seek instruction, in any art I can undertake, from the best instructors available.

This past May, J.R. Beardsley adjudicated Webster University's certification testing of the graduating seniors. I felt from the beginning that Mr. Beardsley had an antagonistic attitude towards my being the Combat Instructor, instead of the University's having invited a full member to teach. Nothing specific was said, but his attitude was, "I am the fight master, and you are stepping into my territory." Also, his public lack of respect for some of the other full members of the SAFD was very unprofessional. His comment, "David Boushey should be called the frantic father instead of the founding father," was

not supportive and undermined the integrity of the SAFD. He also questioned publicly some of Joseph Martinez's techniques or abilities. I personally respect both of these gentlemen a great deal.

I explained to Mr. Beardsley that there were a couple of mistakes in my choreography (i.e., the upstage leg being forward instead of the downstage for the groin kick, and the foot over face instead of using sight line to create the illusion). Yet, it appeared to me that the decision to fail everyone was made prior to seeing any of the scenes. I asked if he wanted to see the fight, or the written choreography, and his reply was "no." How do you know if the combatant is following specific choreography unless you have seen it? For example, all shoulder cuts were impractical, due to a lack of adequate training space, so I choreographed cuts to the neck instead. The critique appeared to be on stylistic differences as much as on incorrect technique. Also, one of my students received a cut on her forehead during a rehearsal two weeks prior to the testing, and that was mentioned several times (as if it had never happened before in the history of stage combat).

I respect my students' efforts and work and am there to help them, not to stifle their creativity. For that reason, I asked Mr. Beardsley if he thought I should leave Webster or discontinue teaching stage combat because of a lack of experience. I would not hinder anyone learning his craft. I would leave that art first. My ego does not need to be fed by leading students around as though they were sheep. My philosophy of teaching is to point a way and to follow along, to assure that students stay on the correct path.

Mr. Beardsley's answer was that he felt I needed more training, and I agreed. Regardless of my ability in any of my arts, there is always a need for training. I explained that I still studied, occasionally, with Mr. Langfelder, whom I mentioned earlier, and who has also been a fencing student of Arvilla Droll for the past twenty-five years. His response was, "But he is a student of Joseph's too." Such a response made it difficult for me to continue a professional respect for Mr. Beardsley.

I attended the workshop Mr. Martinez taught at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville at the end of June. During the workshop, Joseph had to leave because of an emergency and I taught the last three days of that workshop (at the request of SIUE and the participants). I am also attending Mr. Martinez's workshop in Virginia in August.

When Mr. Beardsley left, he said he was going to discuss his thoughts with Erik Fredricksen, as Erik had adjudicated past tests. I didn't quite understand that logic, unless it was political. I was to call Mr. Beardsley the next morning, and he was to tell me his decision as to anyone's passing. I called, and he had not yet talked to Mr. Fredricksen. I called six more times over the next six days (with Mr. Beardsley making one call to me). Finally, on the seventh day, I called Mr. Beardsley very early in the morning and was told that he didn't see how he could pass one person without passing everyone. I saw quality differences in my students, and I did not think all should have passed, but there were some who should have. Why should there be a blanket pass/fail procedure?

I realize what has been done is done, but in good faith I feel some Webster students were denied a fair and objective test.

I am a staunch supporter of the SAFD. When Mr. Sargent asked me about Mr. Boushey's videotapes, I immediately said, "Of course, buy the series," for myself as well as for the students. Anytime I teach a workshop, I mention the SAFD and the importance of safety that is realized when you are working opposite someone who is actor/combatant certified.

J.R., I understand that you do excellent work. This letter is in no way questioning your abilities as an actor, combatant, or choreographer. My reaction is strictly business, nothing personal. If you are ever in St. Louis, I would not only talk with you, but would also study with you as well, as I will always be a student.

Sincerely,
Bob Goodwin

I am writing this in response to a letter I received from Mr. Goodwin in which he discusses my decision to fail all his students who attempted certification last spring in St. Louis. I am simply going to address that letter as it was written, in order of the items mentioned.

First of all you say you are a trained martial artist and then you mention your "modest" training in stage combat. My question to you is how many years did or have you studied T'ai Chi Ch'uan before you considered yourself an instructor in that discipline? I hope it was for more time than your study of stage combat. Before you qualify yourself as an instructor in any field, I believe it is an asset to have studied another field of movement training. Maybe it should be mandatory. But it really has nothing to do with this art of stage combat except that it is what ballet is to jazz dance. It gives you added control and body awareness but nothing as far as information as to performance or teaching of this art. Besides being a martial artist, you must be an actor, director, dancer, and armorer. It takes years to become an artist; a blackbelt in any martial art is merely a serious student. So what does a year or two of training classify you as? From what I can ascertain you have had less than a year's training all totaled.

I am sorry you felt from the outset that I had an "antagonistic" attitude towards you being an instructor. On the other hand, I simply feel you have an overblown ego and, obviously, an incredible respect for yourself as an instructor and combatant that I did not see at the time of your students' adjudication. Frankly, from the performance I saw of your work as a combatant/actor at the time I was in St. Louis, I would have been hard pressed to pass you if you had not been the instructor. I am also amazed as to your whole marketing of our meeting. You did not explain any mistakes in "your choreography" until after I had corrected you. That sounded like an excuse for lack of knowledge. When every student of yours that I see performs mistakes in the same manner, it is obvious what is wrong. This choreography you called "yours" was merely a poor imitation of what was given to you the summer before in a three week workshop on stage combat. No, I did not need to see the written choreography. First of all, I had seen it before, and, secondly, I have been certifying students for the Society for five years, as a working professional fight director. It is rather simple to see moves when they have no targets or even when the process of the move is not apparent to the people taking the test. It was quite obvious you were not sure of why or where a good deal of the moves were going. I watched three students get hit with swords and distance was a universal problem. All but one group was one step from slow motion (God bless them for trying in their ignorance) and when they "went for it" I feared for their safety as well as mine. No, Mr. Goodwin, this decision to fail everyone was not premeditated. I have a considerable love for the art and an ever-gaining respect for its exposure and use. I told you my heart wanted to pass them. I have been in their chair and yours many times. I know you and your students worked hard, but if I pass them, I am throwing away everything I have been working for these past ten years. If my colleagues feel I was unreasonable in my judgment, I will give you an apology and then drop out of the Society. If you look back on our meeting you know I did not slam you for teaching something I did not feel you were ready to teach, but I encouraged you to learn more and grow. Now I am not sure I was right in doing that.

I have never criticized Joe Martinez's ability as a teacher or choreographer. I encouraged you to study from another source because up until the time I met you, you had only studied with either Martinez or a student of his. I saw your poor imitation of his style. The style of sword work Martinez teaches on a beginning level is different than most of the Society members. Personally I think we should all give a standard beginning technique and then vary styles with the more experienced actor/combatant, but I was not opposed to the technique you used and, even if I were, it is no reason to fail students. It had no influence on my decision in your case. My suggestion to study with another person besides Martinez was made because there are many different approaches to stage combat. If you are going to label yourself as a professional, you must experience different styles before you can begin to develop a style of your own. I feel no different now than when I saw your work. I encourage more study on your part and I am glad you are working on it. I am glad you are a staunch supporter of the SAFD and I hope you will be able to look back and be thankful for my decision.

I feel you have a great deal to learn about this business. Be careful whom you attack and when. I think you should re-evaluate my visit and who you are in this business more objectively because as of this time, I perceive you as one of the reasons it worries me to be a member of the SAFD.

I could go on about our meeting, but I believe this is plenty. I would like to end this letter by addressing both David Boushey and Joseph Martinez. They both know me better than you do and can attest that my humour is, at times, a bit twisted. If I said anything I should be sorry for, I apologize. I don't believe I haven't given either Joe or David the credit they deserve for their work. And even though I hate to admit it, maybe I should steer clear of the midwest. I am not sure if I translate into that language.

Sincerely,
John Robert Beardsley

POINTS OF INTEREST

CERTIFICATION: *The Legend of Daniel Boone*

Recently, I traveled to the outdoor drama *The Legend of Daniel Boone* to adjudicate the students of Associate Member Charles Killian. I am pleased to announce that all of his students passed. This is the second year that he has taught for this company of actors and the good training and discipline that he instills in them certainly shows through.

While none of the students received recommendations, all of them demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the basic techniques. My congratulations go to Dale Johnson for his efforts in a scene from Christopher Durang's *The Actor's Nightmare.* His improvement in the area of physical control, since his attendance at the National Fight Workshop two years ago, was astounding.

I would like to see more emphasis placed on the acting of the fight. This is my complaint about all of the work I see on stage. (See the September 1985 issue for my address to teachers of stage combat.) I believe that all teachers have a responsibility to their students to instruct them in the proper techniques of acting a stage fight.

Bob Ford, General Manager of the theatre, should be thanked for his support of the SAFD certification program. This is an ongoing event at his theatre which serves to recruit actors as well as offer them an educational service. More theatres should think about doing the same.

And last of all, Mr. Killian has done a very thorough job of training his students. He cares about teaching, about the progress and development of his students, and about his personal growth as a teacher.

The following students were certified:

531 Gary Hackenburg	540 Polly King
532 Barry Lambert	541 Lisa Solick
533 Leo Bahr	542 Van Epperson
534 Mike Jones	543 Melanie Brooke
535 Barbara Brandt	544 Benji Guill
536 Tracy Wilson	545 Todd Studebaker
537 Mike Mangan	
538 Kevin Fabian	Instructor: Charles Killian
539 Dale Johnson	Adjudicator: David Leong

CALL FOR ASSISTANTS

The SAFD wishes to announce that one or two assistants will be needed for the 1986 National Stage Combat Workshop to be held at Memphis State University from July 14th through August Ist. Interested people should submit a letter of intent and a detailed resume that includes experience and training in stage combat. The telephone numbers of three persons familiar with the applicants background as a teacher and/or choreographer should also be included as references. No letters of recommendation or reviews of choreography are needed.

The assistants will be required to work with one or more instructors in the classroom. Partnering, demonstration and outside coaching will be expected. Weapons maintenance, some typing and xeroxing and other related activities will also be required.

Assistants will be provided housing during the three week residency and will be allowed to attend and to participate in the other master classes when their schedule allows. It is the hope that the applicants will be aspiring fight directors or teachers of stage combat who wish to brush up on their technique and gain more knowledge. Applicants must be Affiliate or Associate SAFD members in good standing. Send your applications to David Leong, National Coordinator, NKU Campus Station, Highland Heights, KY 41076.

NEW MEMBERS

Leo Bahr (Affiliate)
930 W. Franklin #5
Richmond, Virginia 23220

Matt Glave (Affiliate)
10 S. High St.
Athens, Ohio 45701

Orley I. Holtan (Friend)
Department of Theatre
Slippery Rock University
Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania 16057-9989

Kerry James (Skalsky) (Affiliate)
17 Richmond Road
Ealing, London W5 5NS
Eng1and 01-567-0266

Kristina Lankford (Affiliate)
2233 Grant St. #316
Berkeley, California 94703

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Payson Burt
1717 Green St. #6
Philadelphia, PA 19130

Cass Foster
Ohio State University
Theatre Department
1680 University Drive
Mansfield, OH 44906

T.J. Glenn
34-03 30th Avenue
Astoria, N.Y. 11103

William Hauserman
HHC USMCA-K
Box 181 (MSA)
APO N.Y. 09164

Bruce Lecuru
50 W. 34th St.
Apt 17B10
New York, N.Y. 10001

Fred Lennertz III
8110 E. 20th St.
Indianapolis, IND 46219

David Leong
319 Garrard St.
Covington, KY 41011-1737

Robert Lindsay
#6 2401 Queen St. East
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M1N 1A2

Phyllis Richmond
9 Blue Line Drive Apt. B
Athens, Ohio 45701

Robert Scranton
1400 Old Forge Drive #101
Little Rock, Arkansas 72202

Richard Smith
P.O. Box 106
Rocky Hill, N.J. 08553

Jay Stone
7 Dawson Ave.
Salem, N.H. 03079

Merideth Taylor
603 E. 14th St.
Bloomington, IN 47401

Craig Turner
800 Powell st.
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514

PINS, BADGES AND T-SHIRTS

If you want pins or badges with the Society insignia, they are available through David Boushey, 4720 38th N.E., Seattle, Washington 98105. The T-Shirts now come in Gold on Black along with the standard black print on beige.

SOCIETY NEWS

J.R. BEARDSLEY studied with Paddy Crean this fall and spent a week in New York seeing members and their work. At Santa Maria where he is artist-in-residence he worked on a new musical *Narnia* based on C.S. Lewis in which he played Fenris Wolf, the head of the witches' secret police.

DAVID BOUSHEY recently returned from North Carolina where he was a stuntman and fight arranger for the Dino de Laurentiis film *Blue Velvet.* David is presently choreographing the fights in *Robin Hood* for the Seattle Children's Theatre. Later David will be doing stunt work in Vancouver B.C. on a feature film in the not-too-distant future. He continues to teach movement/combat at Seattle's Cornish Institute.

PAYSON BURT took Joseph Martinez's workshop at Irish Creek Academy last summer. In September he joined the faculty at Temple University in Philadelphia to create and teach a three year course on stage combat.

TIM and BABS CARRYER have changed the name of their performing group from "Circus Ridiculus" to "Carryer and Bailey." Their show includes a comic court sword fight between a very upper-crust English couple, and the initial argument centers around their dog, Skipper. Tim and Babs recently performed at the Second New York International Festival of Clown-Theatre and at Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors. DREW FRACHER choreographed a comic quarterstaff fight between "Babola and Timolius," two ancient characters in half-masks for the show. Carryer and Bailey also did shows in Brooklyn, New England, Pennsylvania with a December residency at Washington and Lee University, hosted by Joseph Martinez.

CHARLES CONWELL directed *Hamlet* in November at Bryn Mawr College with Hamlet and Laertes being played by women. Charles used the heavy rapiers by Dennis Graves and parrying daggers by Santelli-Excaliber, whose weight proved to be a challenge to the actresses resulting in a more authentic and dangerous looking fight than one would see with epee bladed weapons. Charles continues to teach at the Philadelphia College of Performing Arts. In January, Charles studied with Paddy Crean for two weeks.

CASS FOSTER began teaching and directing at Ohio State University at Mansfield this fall after having completed his MFA at the University of Illinois.

T.J. GLENN performed and sword fought in the play *The Vespinian Chronicles* for Grainne Productions which was choreographed by Society member IAN ROSE. He went on to choreograph a fight for the U.S. premiere of *Abel's Sister* at the Echo Stage Company in New York. Last summer he spent six months performing and acting as Fight Captain for the Eighth New York Renaissance Festival in which some one hundred and twenty five fights were staged. He appeared as an evil KGB agent on *One Life to Live* and as a stunt double on *Search for Tomorrow.* He was a dancer in the Disney film *Offbeat* and worked on the TV film *Jackboot* as a stunt coordinator, staging football violence, fights and stairfalls.

WILLIAM HAUSERMAN has been working for the Army as a theatre director in Karlsruhe, Germany. In October he conducted a Master Class in Unarmed Stage Combat for all the theatre directors and many volunteers who were working in Europe for the Army. Workshops in Rapier and Dagger will follow in January.

CHARLES KILLIAN taught another class in stage combat at Harrodsburg this past summer where he was assisted by Mark Menter. During the winter Charles performs cabaret style marionette shows for the Winterfest at Kings Island in Cincinnati.

BRUCE LECURU is a guest artist teaching stage combat at a workshop for Interlocheal Arts Academy in Michigan.

PHYLLIS RICHMOND recently became an assistant professor of stage movement at Ohio University.

SAMUEL SANDOE just completed his seventh season as an actor with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and continues to do theatre work locally in Boulder, Colorado.

RICHARD D. SMITH choreographed fight scenes for the Mercer County Community College Theatre and last year collaborated with Steve Kasakoff on *Romeo and Juliet* at MCCC. Richard continues as a full time writer for the Princeton Packet newspaper group as well as a freelancer in T.V. and film.

DAVID SOLLARS has been studying Tai Chi Chuan, and Tai Chi narrow blade sword with Master Yang Jwing-Ming in Boston, as well as studying Japanese Shiatsu Therapy and the Japanese language.

TONY SOPER choreographed the fights and played Laertes for Tacoma Actor's Guild production of *Dogg's Hamlet.* He also choreographed a protracted scene for TAC's production of *A Couple of White Chicks Sitting Around Talking.* He's currently appearing at The Empty Space in *Rat in the Skull* and at A Contemporary Theatre in *A Christmas Carol.* At the Seattle Repertory Theatre he'll be appearing in *The Real Thing.* He'll also be choreographing *Romeo and Juliet* for Pacific Lutheran University.

CRAIG TURNER is currently Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Dramatic Arts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hills and is also Company Movement Coach for PlayMakers Repertory Company.

DAVID WCOLLEY is now teaching stage combat at Columbia College and just finished a grade C slasher film, *Henry,* soon to be released. He also staged the fights for the Lyric Opera's *Anna Bolyna.* He will be staging fights for *A Cry of Players* in February at Columbia College and *Sweeney Todd* at the Apple Tree Theatre. David was also the subject of the "Spotlight" in December's *Stagebill.*

3 Video Tapes by David Boushey
Founder of The Society of American Fight Directors

Steven Spielberg, *Director*
"His fights were among the best I had ever seen on stage."

Jon Jory, *Artistic Director, Actors Theatre, Louisville*
"It is very simply the best and safest combat work I have seen anywhere comparing favorably with the quality at all three Stratfords."

Kyle McLachlan, *Actor*
"Boushey's training was invaluable to me in my work with Dune."

Robert Hobbs, *Director, P.A.T.P., University of Washington*
"Combat for the Stage and Screen is a must for any drama department who wants to promote safe and exciting fight choreography. The content and quality is exceptionally thorough."

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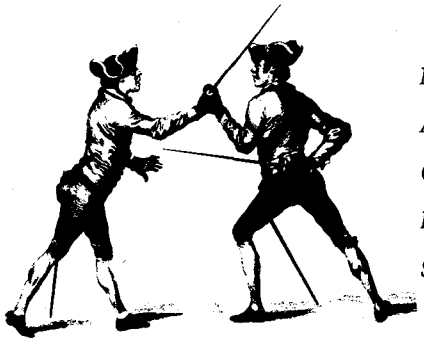

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