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The Cutting Edge

The Society of American Fight Directors

5-1999

The Cutting Edge, May/June 1999, Vol. 10 Issue 2

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The SAFD Suffers a Profound Loss

James R. Finnipot, nee *James Finney*, aged 45, died suddenly in his home in Evanston from complications from Marfan's syndrome. He was husband and friend of Melanie and their beagle companion Heidi. James held a doctorate in theater from Northwestern University and had served on the faculties at the College of Wooster, De Paul School of Theatre, the University of Iowa and, more recently, at Loyola University. He was a long time member of the Society of American Fight Directors and served as secretary for the SAFD from 1987 through 1989. James performed and taught theater in England, France, and Australia, where he had a profound influence on the lives of many young actors. He also worked with developing theater troupes in Burkina Faso, West Africa. He and Melanie were the first to bicycle around the world on recumbent bicycles. James believed you can't stop living to keep from dying. Memorials may be made to:

The National Marfan Foundation,
328 Main St.,

Port Washington, NY 11050-3121
or to a theatre scholarship fund at the
College of Wooster,
Wooster, OH 44691.

James contributed a great deal to this organization over the years and was a role model to many of us. He will be sorely missed.



As the SAFD Gears up for NSCW '99, a look back at NSCW '98

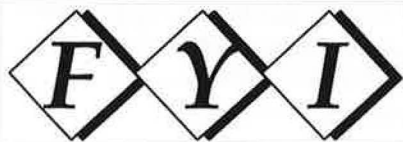
1998 NSCW Report by Michael Chin

Welcome aboard twelve spanking new Certified Teachers!
At the conclusion of the 19th Annual National Stage Combat Workshops, which were once again graciously hosted for the tenth consecutive year by the University of Nevada Las Vegas, Department of Theatre Arts we welcomed into our ranks twelve brand new Certified Teachers. They were graduates of a gruelling three week intensive training program, that we affectionately call the Teachers' Training Workshop. The TTW was master taught by FMs Drew Fracher, Richard Raether and Dale Girard. Excellent job guys. Congratulations lady and gentlemen. All hail the Class of 1998!

Along with the TTW, the Actor Combatant Workshop saw forty-four

students pass the Skills Proficiency Test. It was a landmark SPT in that it saw the passing away of the old "recommended actor/combatant" status, which was replaced by the revolutionary concept of the "Examiner's Award for Excellence". The Examiner's Award for Excellence is an acknowledgement of fine and outstanding work exhibited by the actor/combatant during the performance of his/her skills test and no longer should be interpreted as a life achievement status.

The ACW also heralded the return to active duty of Fight Master JD Martinez, who for the past three years had been on emeritus status. Welcome back Joseph. The Actor Combatant workshop was master taught by FMs David Boushey,
(continued on next page)



CHANGE IN ADDRESS

Michael Chin has moved. His new address is:

Michael G. Chin
260 W. 22nd St. Apt. #3
New York, N.Y. 10011
Phone # 1(212) 807-1004
Fax # 1(212) 807-9557

Michael Hood also has a new address:

Michael Hood
College of Fine Arts
110 Sprowls
Indiana University of
Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705
(724) 357-2397
(724) 463-9192

E-mail mhood@grove.iup.edu

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

London based SAFD Fight Director Richard Ryan has just staged the fights for 'The Colleen Bawn' at the Royal National Theatre. Prior to this he (and Robert Macdougall) staged an epic battle involving eighty actors and four elephants, explosions, high falls, rappelling and bungees at a new theme park in Phuket, Thailand. Richard being 'Fights and Stunts' and Bob 'Stunts and Fights'.

Dale Girard, David Woolley, Chris Villa and as mentioned JD Martinez. Kudos to you gentlemen, as well.

For the third year in a row the Workshops were preceeded by the increasingly popular Fight Directors' Camp. This is a four day conference open to all Fight Masters, Fight Directors, Certified Teachers and invited guests where we meet, work out and exchange ideas and stuff. And as in past FDC's, it was a huge success.

Speaking of success, Weapon's Night, once again proved to be a highlight of the workshop, as Lewis Shaw, American Fencer's Supply and Mark Allen, (who stole the show with his fancy whip work and gun slinging techniques) did their best to arm fighters both beginners and advanced. And as a reflection of the growth of the SAFD, no less than five regional workshops were advertised that night.

This past year we initiated a brand new award at the workshop. The David L. Boushey Award will be presented annually to a student who shows outstanding proficiency in Unarmed stage combat and, who better to receive the inaugural award, but the Maestro himself. And since I am talking about awards, I was very proud and pleased to see that Donald Preston, my Head Journeyperson won the illustrious Paddy Crean Award. The Paddy Crean Award is given every year to the one person at the workshop who exemplies most in his /her attitude and work ethic what the SAFD stands for. Congrats to both David and Don.

The 19th Annual NSCW was special to me in that it marked my first year 'driving the bus'. And as they say any landing you can walk away from is a good one. And as another saying goes: "We can only go up!" With this in mind we look forward to this year's endeavor: Our 20th Anniversary Workshops.

That about wraps it up. It was a very satisfying and rewarding summer for me. I thank my cracker jack Faculty and Staff for making the transition from the 'Reign of the Rat' to the 'Chin Dynasty' a smooth and fulfilling one. I hope to see you all this year.

Fraternally,
The Emperor

1998 NSCW Faculty and Staff

Workshop Coordinator - Michael G. Chin
On site Coordinator - Linda McCollum
Assistant Coordinator / Head Teaching Assistant - Scot Mann

ACW Faculty and Assistants

Unarmed - David Boushey and Paul Dennhardt
Rapier & Dagger - David Woolley and Robert "Tink" Tuftee
Broadsword - J.D. Martinez and Michael Kirkland
Quarterstaff - Christopher Villa and Michael Johnson
Smallsword - Dale Girard and Michael Johnson

TTW Faculty

Drew Facher, Richard Raether, Dale Girard

TTW Assistants

Scot Mann, Chuck Coyl

NSCW Journeypersons

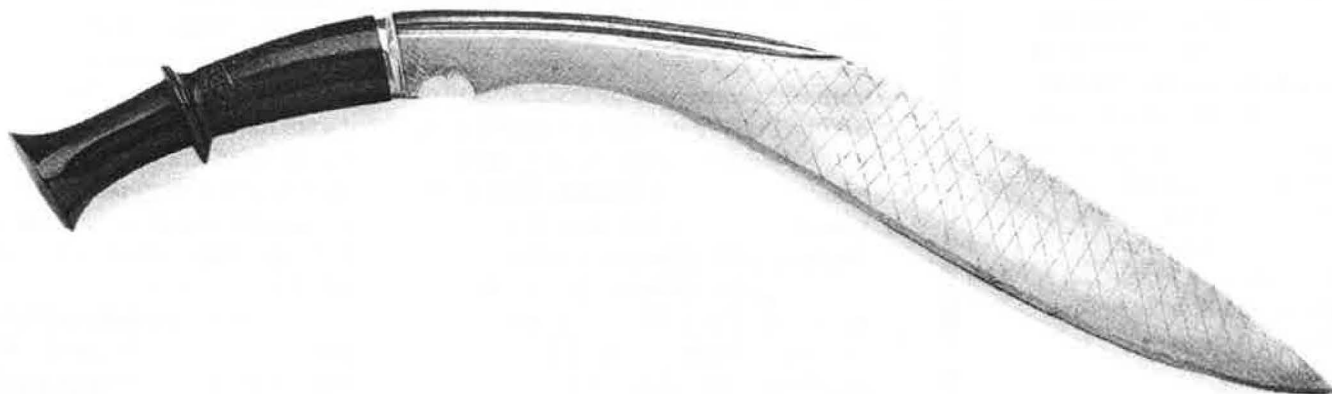
Head Journeyperson - Donald Preston
Regina Cerimele, Michael DiPrizio, Gwendolyn Druyor, Arthur M. Jolly,
Khris Lewin, Jacquelyn Ritz

NSCW Award Winners

President's Award - Colleen Kelly
Paddy Crean - Donald Preston

Actor/Combatant Workshop

Best Female - Jennifer Waldroup
Best Male - Robert Behrens
Best Scene - Leigh Ann Wilson and Caleb Terray



T H E C U T T I N G E D G E

Workshop Announcements

National Stage Combat Workshops and Advanced Actor Combatant Workshops
July 12-30 at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas
702-895-3662 (www.safd.org)



International Paddy Crean Stage Combat Workshop
August 15-23, Edinburgh, Scotland. 757-220-5033
www.ioisp.org

Summer Sling III
August 26-29. Fights4 & Pace University, New York City.
212-330-6868
NSCWboss@aol.com

Virginia Tea Party
October 15-17. College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA. 757-220-5033
www.ioisp.org

Turkey Shoot Workshop
November 26-28. Atlanta Stage Combat Studio, Atlanta, GA.
404-523-6623
www.stagecombat.com

International Stage Combat Workshop III
March 27-April 8, 2000
Scotland.
<http://members.aol.com/ISCW3>

Teaching in a Foreign Land by *Michelle Ladd, Certified Teacher*

Last June I had the good fortune of traveling to Korea to teach a stage combat workshop at Kaya University in the small town of Koryong. The focus was "essential unarmed technique" for the University's drama students. . . . simple enough except for the language barrier, which presented the main challenge for student and teacher alike. The students spoke little to no English, and I spoke only enough Korean to order beer and find the rest room. Although an interpreter with minimal English skills was provided, we were forced to communicate on an almost entirely physical level. Also, I had no trained assistant, which meant demonstrations both depended on and created instantaneous teacher/student trust.

With the aid of emphatic gestures and vocals, basic concepts of eye contact, distance, and partner communication were learned almost immediately. Once we established a "sign language" for these particulars, students were able to not only learn and execute technique (punch, avoid, kicks, hair pulls, etc.) but they were also able to understand and incorporate more intricate ideas like extension, objective/obstacle, and intension of the movement. In this way the class became much more than a lesson in unarmed skills and performing choreography, but became an exercise in analytical thinking and problem solving -- cognitive self-assessment of their performance technique and my teaching technique. It was immediately obvious by their behavior when they understood a concept and when they did not. Actions truly spoke louder than words.

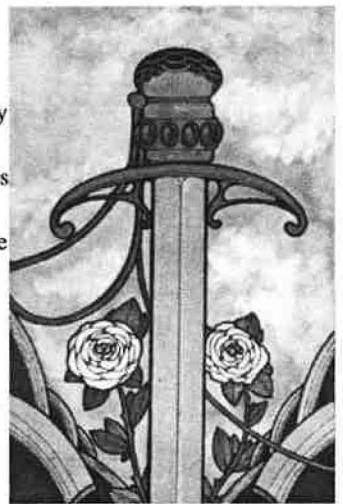
As for the interpreter provided, the students found that they understood my ideas and concepts better without her translations. The clear connections they made occurred primarily after I stopped focusing on body movement particulars, i.e. how to punch, and instead challenged the class to understand the concepts of status between characters, offensive vs. defensive behavior, telling the story of the fight, and placing focus on the physical choices each character made during a fight -- all demonstrated with body language rather than interpreted lectures.

This analytical process developed naturally within the first hour of class. Challenging students mentally and not just physically, early in

the teaching/learning process, accelerated their comprehension. When these students' bodies functioned in a logical fashion moving from one technique to the next (how the character justified each consecutive movement), technique was solid. This process made sense to them because each actor had a physical story to tell - just like a dancer in an epic ballet or an athlete aiming for a goal has a physical challenge they must rise to meet or the story cannot unfold. Each of these students strove not for perfect technique but for the story within that they wanted to express; and their technique was remarkably cleaner than if we had run drills for hours. They understood that the story became vague without precision, and so we were able to make intricate scene adjustments despite our language differences. For these students, it was less about learning technical skills and more about learning a new "body vocabulary" to widen their ability to communicate ideas.

They were not babied or allowed to perform sloppy technique. Their questions (in sign language) were clear and intelligent. What we had in common was our desire to communicate on a physical

level. Laban would have had a field day watching our "correspondence." The results were truly inspiring and drove home how limitless our range of communication is in the physical realm. Without a common verbal language, the focus of our work became clear: to build our combat techniques on the foundation of shared human experience and each individual's need to understand and express the causes and consequences of violence.



Back-Word

by Pops

When I was a young member of this organization coming up, I heard tales of a member who had been diagnosed with a rare, and usually terminal disease. As I heard the tale, this man had defied his diagnosis, and had with his wife bicycled around the world, and through this exertion, somehow earned at least a temporary reprieve from death.

I never met James Finney (as he was then known), but his reputation as a teacher and the stories of his bravery and courage in spite of the odds inspired me. Here was a true warrior spirit, waging a battle of Hope against Despair!

Years later, we would all be shocked and amazed by the stories of Michael Anderson's courageous and

miraculous recovery from death's door. Indeed, another example of Hope (or in Michael's case: Stubbornness) battling against Despair and winning!

I have just been told of another fallen comrade: Vita Andersen, of Sweden, was struck by a drunk driver and thrown under an oncoming bus. She is now in a coma and is being watched closely. Let us hope and pray that she, too, recovers.

James has passed, but his legacy of bravery and integrity carry on. We are truly indebted to him, and to those like him who remind us of what it means to fight the real battles.

Namaste, James.

The Cutting Edge

is concocted bimonthly by
David Doersch.

The Cutting Edge
is a publication of the
Society of American Fight Directors

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