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Summer 1996

The Fight Master, Spring/Summer 1996, Vol. 19 Issue 1

The Society of American Fight Directors

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The cover features a central illustration of a man in 17th-century attire, including a red coat, a blue sash, and a black hat with a white plume. He is holding a sword aloft in his right hand. The background is a complex, multi-colored marbled pattern with swirling, feather-like designs in shades of green, blue, red, and gold. The title 'The Fight Master' is overlaid on the top half of the image in a large, stylized, orange-gold font.

The Fight Master

JOURNAL
OF THE
SOCIETY
OF
AMERICAN
FIGHT
DIRECTORS

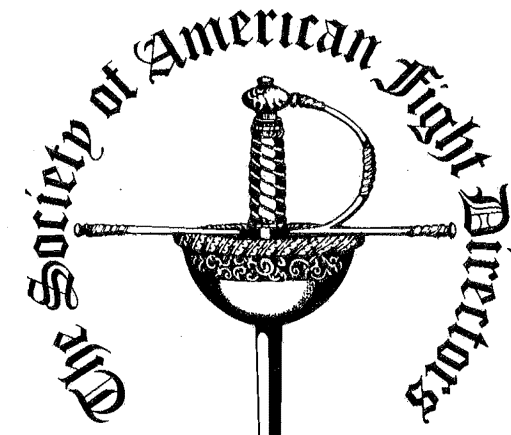
SPRING/
SUMMER
1996
VOLUME
XIX
NUMBER 1

The Fight Master

is a publication of

The Society of American Fight Directors

DEDICATED TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND SAFETY OF STAGE COMBAT



Founded in 1977, the SAFD is a non-profit organization of theater professionals, academicians, friends and supporters, all of whom share a common interest in the art of stage violence.

Led by the country's top fight choreographers, the SAFD stands for the very highest standard in effective and safe theatrical fighting.

The SAFD has developed recognized standards for three levels of skill in the stage combat arts.

ACTOR/COMBATANT

The actor/combatant is an individual who has received basic training in three to six weapon forms and passed a proficiency skills test. The actor/combatant certificate expires three years from the date of issue, but is renewable through a re-testing process. The actor/combatant certificate does not qualify an individual to teach stage combat or to arrange fight scenes. But it does signify SAFD recognition of this individual as a safe, competent performer.

CERTIFIED TEACHER

A certified teacher of stage combat is an individual who has first passed the actor/combatant proficiency skills test and then, in addition, had extensive educational training and passed SAFD tests in teaching techniques, historical styles, weapons theory and practice, and theatrical choreography. The SAFD endorses this individual to teach stage combat.

CERTIFIED FIGHT MASTER

A fight master is an individual who has completed all requirements of an actor/combatant and a certified teacher. Beyond this, he or she must have a strong professional background, have choreographed a minimum of twenty union productions and passed an extensive oral, written and practical examination. Fight masters are endorsed by the SAFD to teach, coach, and choreograph in professional theatre, film and television, and in the academic arena.

This journal printed entirely on recycled paper.



Paddy Crean Workshop '96

Society of American Fight Directors

Drew Fracher
Erik Fredricksen

Society of British Fight Directors

Jonathan Howell
Richard Ryan

Nordic Stage Fight Society

"Peppe" Ostensson

Fight Directors Canada

Paddy Crean

Robert Seale
J.P. Fournier
John Brogan
Jean-Francois Gagnon
Gary Foo

September
20, 21, 22

Where: **The Shaw Festival**
"Niagara-on-the-Lake"
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or an hour from Buffalo"

"The Paddy Crean workshop is an intensive three-day workshop featuring a **handful** of master teachers from four national stage combat societies. It is an opportunity for teachers and students from all over the world to get together and share techniques in the stage combat arts. The focus of this year's workshop is to honor Paddy for a lifetime of dedicated service to the art of stage combat. Paddy hopes to see a number of his old friends that he has been associated with in fencing, acting and stage combat through the years. Sunday night will conclude with a gala event to celebrate his career with many of Paddy's friends through stories, film clips, and a good deal of wit. 'One more for the Gipper.' Hope to see you all there."

Brad Alan Waller

Copy & Slash-out registration form for Paddy Crean Workshop 1996

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info:

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Brad Waller (703) 323-7233

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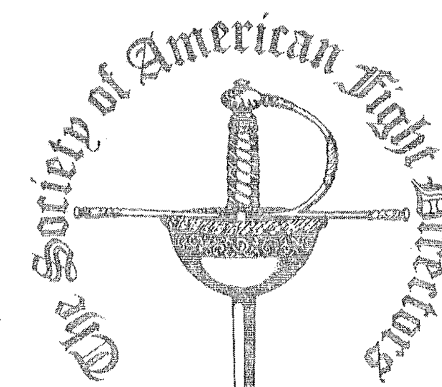
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Editorially Speaking



BY
MARGARET
RAETHER

THIS TURNED OUT TO BE AN ISSUE DEVOTED TO TEACHING STAGE COMBAT.

The hot topic right now seems to be "acting the fight" and, in addition to another installment of "Acting Tough," there is Payson Burt's hearty endorsement of Killer Ball, and a series of acting exercises for combatants by Jamie Cheatham.

I blame Jack Young (let's all blame Jack), whose article "What happened to the Actor in Actor/ Combatant?" [Spring 1995 *Fight Master*] sparked some great dialogue on exactly how to teach students to combine good technique with solid, in-depth acting.

Who was the world's greatest swordsman? Answer: page 23. And Dr. Kathy Biesinger gives a Shakespeare director's view on stage combat.

Congratulations to Fight Master J. Allen Suddeth (call him "Author"), whose new book *Fight Directing for the Theater* just came out. Another literary member of the SAFD, Richard Lane, wants some help on a book he is working on — give him a hand by filling out the questionnaire on page 10. (Xerox it so you don't cut up your *Fight Master*. I like to pretend that you cherish each issue — don't disillusion me!)

Margaret Raether

about

the Cover

the duc de Villars

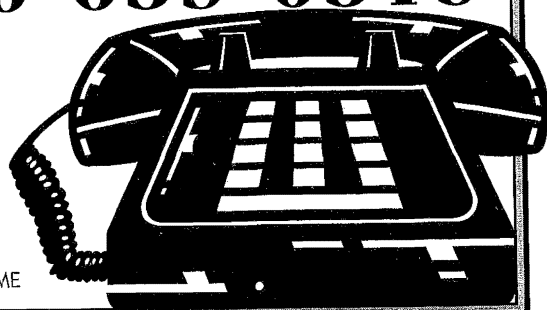
Claude Louis Hector, the duc de Villars, leads an attack against an Allied entrenchment at Denain, July 24, 1712, during the War of the Spanish Succession. The figure of Claude Louis is a detail from the painting *Bataille de Denain*, by Jean Alaux.

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HOT LINE

9A.M.-5P.M.

EASTERN STANDARD TIME



The Fight Master

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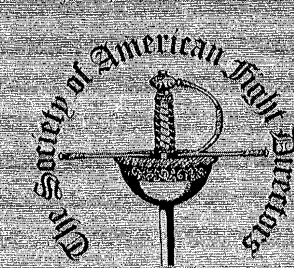
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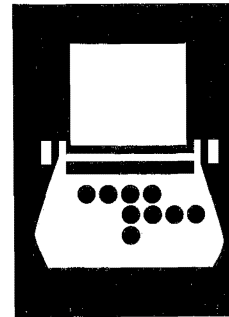
Submissions to the Fight Master
should be sent to:

1834 Camp Avenue
Rockford, IL 61103

Submitted material may be edited
for clarity and length.



Letters



STAGE COMBAT AS A MARTIAL ART

I think Richard Pallaziol both misinterprets and misunderstands the basic premise of my article "Stage Combat as a New Martial Art."

I nowhere suggest that stage combat is about fighting or for fighters. The contention that "we are not fighters" is surely faulty since many of "us" have training and experience in boxing, fencing, karate-do, or aikido. My concern is Mr. Pallaziol's use of the confusing term "fighting" in reference to martial arts training.

What my article does suggest is a slight change in emphasis, in thinking, in teaching philosophy, towards a more inclusive, less exclusive idea of stage combat training. We need only broaden our base philosophy to encompass far more general artistic, theatrical, and human concerns in our training systems in order to meet the needs of far more people.

Whether stage combat people are "fighters" or not, has no bearing on my position that stage combat training and karate-do training (for instance) are similar in outcome-based ways. I recommend the works of John Donohue and the Journal of Asian Martial Arts for insight into martial art, and the purposes and motivations surrounding and penetrating martial art training. The subject cannot be summed up effectively by wielding emotion-laden terms like "fighting," "the street," or "fear and pain."

The argument that stage combat should be excluded from the same company as judo, karate-do, and aikido because, if I understand the gist of Mr. Pallaziol's argument, the uses of stage combat are different, seems spurious. Surely students come to martial arts and stage combat training for a wide range of reasons and put that training to a wide range of uses.

My article suggests that a broader set of goals for stage combat—broader certainly than that of a "tool which helps us move the audience to experience the playwright's vision"—might enhance training and attract more students.

Furthermore, I suspect that the "notion" should be advanced that stage combat should be "learned by all actors" for the sake of its intrinsic values and not as a mere performance tool. Movement training can make "expert persons" not just actors. Not every acting student will need this particular tool, but I'd bet that every acting student can benefit from stage combat training even if they never take a fall, deliver a slap, or swing a sword on stage.

Martial art training is not really that far removed from stage combat training. Especially in arts such as aikido, the training follows much the same patterns as that found in stage

combat classrooms. Aikido is not about pain and fear. Just the opposite. The purposes a martial art may be put to are legion. So are the purposes of stage combat training. The training itself, in the broadest sense, is much the same. Also, and this was my central point, the outcomes sought are much the same.

I want my students to train themselves for the joy of growth as people, and as expressors of "life." Rehearsal for performance surely limits the work. The work itself is really all we have. Anything else is delusion.

Also, wouldn't it be neat to have a "martial art" which has a direct practical application to the actor's life for the actor's training for life in a way that, say, taekwondo will never have. Actors could learn skills for life and skills for use at the same time. It wouldn't matter if we ever use the performance tricks, we could always use the life tricks.

I have many students who are not connected to the theatre at all, whose training has little to do with any "practical" use. Movement training is good for everyone, not just actors.

As to the assertion that stage combat does not provide the opportunity to experience the "very real pain and fear as you learn your technique and master your ego" Nuts! What real difference is there between the pain involved in doing randori in judo and the thigh pain encountered in smallsword drill? Pain is pain.

Martial art is not about fighting. Never has been. Martial art is not about self defense. Never has been. Higaonna-sensei surely would agree. "Mastered in the dojo, fear can be mastered in the street." Sure. Fear of failure, fear of your boss, fear of the Self. Othake Risuke shihan of Japan's oldest extant martial art, suggests again and again that training in combative discipline is for the purpose of strengthening character, not making fighters.

By focusing on the "performance" aspect of our art, I'm afraid we push away those who might benefit from its broader outcomes. I believe that the non-cognitive, experiential elements of stage combat training are vastly more important than the cognitive, skills-based, test-centered, performance-oriented ones.

Perhaps stage combat training can have impact in all phases of an actor's life — even non-combat roles. Perhaps stage combat could even be of "use" to people who have no interest in acting? Certainly martial arts can be of "use" to people with no interest in "fighting." Me, for one!

Robert W. Dillon, Jr., Ph.D.
Cape Girardeau, Missouri

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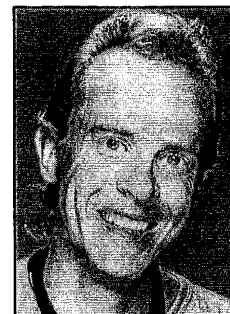
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from the President



BY
DREW
FRACHER

HOPE YOU ARE THRIVING AND FIGHTING SAFELY.
THERE IS LOTS OF GOOD WORK AFOOT NOW THAT
OUR NEW VICE PRESIDENT, COLLEEN KELLY, HAS SETTLED IN

and gotten used to the rest of the motley crew of SAFD officers. We had a meeting recently at Mr. Guinn's Crawdad Boil Workshop in Louisiana and there are many changes in the offing. Most of the changes we discussed simply involve bringing the organization into the present in terms of how policy is formed and adopted. You will all be made aware of any such changes as they solidify.

Suffice it to say that we're working hard to make the SAFD the viable force in the industry that it should and can be and I firmly believe that we are coming into our own. My thanks to all of you out there that are volunteering your time and energies to make these things a reality. No way we could do it without you.

as the techniques we teach and use are safe, first and foremost, and effective then we're doing the right thing.

I'm not prepared to say "so and so is right and so and so is wrong", that seems like a waste of good energy. I think what has become obvious is that the SAFD is the organization in the country that has been setting the standard for some nineteen years and we are recognized by the industry as doing so.

I don't think exclusion is the answer, nor do I believe that we are some punitive body that goes around policing the world of stage combat. What we have to do is continue to make our standards the highest and hold them up for all to see. The proof is in the work we do, the students that we teach and the fights we choreograph; 'nuff said.

Have a good one folks. It looks like the National Workshop is shaping up to be really exciting and I hope to see you all there in some capacity. Keep up the good work, be well and fight safely. Peace.

Drew Fracher
President

"What we have to do is continue to make our standards the highest and hold them up for all to see. The proof is in the work we do, the students that we teach, and the fights that we choreograph — 'nuff said."

In the wake of passionate letters...

I have been reading with interest the barrage of recent letters to the editor contained in these pages. It seems as though Mr. Martinez' letter (published in the Spring '95 *Fight Master*) engendered lots of passionate response and I have been making an effort to follow up on some of these and to try to find out what it is that makes folks ready to jump on the "bash the SAFD" bandwagon. I applaud our editor's efforts to make the letters section a forum for all opinions and I urge her to continue to do so.

Folks, the bottom line is this: this is a business based on ego and no matter how much we might like there to be total agreement, that is never going to be the case. Passionate opinion is good, believing in what you stand for is as well. It seems to me as long

P.S. I am proposing some amendments and changes to our current bylaws and will be calling for a vote of the membership for ratification within the next couple of months. Be on the lookout for further information.

Thanks again.

Be well.

National Stage Combat Workshops

JULY 15-AUG. 2, 1996
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

The Society of American Fight Directors
is a non-profit organization with the
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Actor/Combatant Workshop

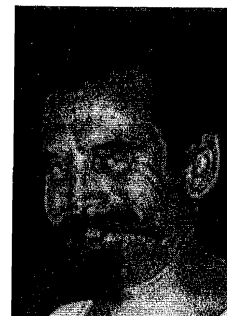
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NSCW report



MARK GUINN
NSCW COORDINATOR



J.R. BEARDSLEY
UNARMED



DREW FRACHER
QUARTERSTAFF
AND SMALLSWORD



RICHARD RAETHER
ADVANCED ACTOR
COMBATANT WORKSHOP

SHARPEN YOUR SWORD AND YOUR SKILLS AT THE NATIONAL STAGE COMBAT WORKSHOPS

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE THE DESERT in July. Which is why we all thank god for air-conditioning. If you are among those making the trek to Las Vegas for the seventeenth annual National Stage Combat Workshops, you can still plan on working up a sweat. The NSCW, sponsored by the Society of American Fight Directors and hosted by our pals at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, is where stage combat enthusiasts gather from all over

and train intensively for three weeks under the eagle eye of six SAFF-certified fight masters.

ACW or AACW...

Two separate workshops make up the NSCW. Running concurrently with the Actor/Combatant Workshop is the Advanced Actor/Combatant Workshop, where students who have passed the skills test will be working on additional weapons and a some varied styles and skills. AACW students will have the opportunity to test in up to six weapons.

The big get-together

The NSCW is the single largest event sponsored by the SAFF each year and provides a unique opportunity to study, to train, and to talk swords until you are blue in the face with other like-minded souls.

You can also buy a nifty t-shirt and even niftier weapons from vendors who will be displaying their wares on the infamous Weapons Night. Remember, you will be among people who consider it perfectly reasonable to own your own broadsword(s).

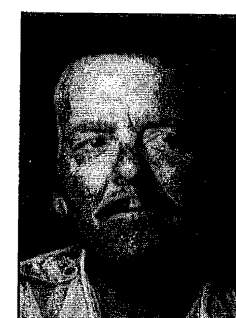
CTs and FMs in pitched battle!

This year, for the first time ever, there will be a master workshop prior to the NSCW. Certified Teachers and Fight Masters will gather together three days early and work out together. I'd love to say that the last ones left standing will preside over the NSCW, but of course, with SAFF emphasis on safety, it will look bloody, but no one will get hurt.

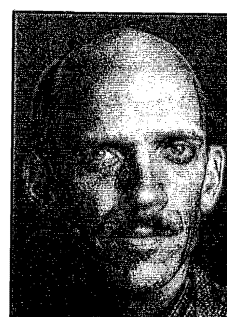
So I look forward to seeing those of you who are heading to Vegas and those of you who are otherwise employed, make sure your voice is heard through your representative (now being elected!).

■■■

Mark Guinn



DAVID BOUSHEY
BROADSWORD



J. ALLEN SUDDETH
RAPIER & DAGGER



CHRISTOPHER VILLA
ADVANCED ACTOR
COMBATANT WORKSHOP

Dear SAFD:

I am writing a book on stage combat that will include a list of people and places where one can receive instruction in stage combat and historical swordplay. Additionally, we would love to publish photos of your school, students and/or performance company in action to help bring the text to life.

Include any information you like (institution name, instructor's name, address, contact number, type of program, etc. Please be as detailed as you like) or e-mail the information to me at RichJLane@AOL.com.

If you would like us to consider photos for inclusion in the book, mail them in and include any photo credits that should be published. We will attempt to return all photos in their original condition.

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BY
LAWRENCE
WOODHOUSE

Workshop report

CHICAGO'S FIRST ANNUAL SAFD WINTER WONDERLAND WORKSHOP AND SUPERBOWL PARTY WAS IN JANUARY.

Two fight masters and five certified teachers combined skills for a weekend of fun and fights while, outside, the weather did its best to demonstrate that Chicago in January is no picnic.

Although billed as a regional SAFD event, stage fighters came from all over the US to participate: Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio, and New York were all well represented, Dan Curran traveled from Maryland; Alex Daye and Joe Costello, along with their wives, came from the tropics of southern Florida; and former Chicagoan Delia Ford came from sunny California. They all arrived just in time as the temperature and the wind chill took a nose dive into the "below zero" range.

Welcome to the Rough House...

Hosted by the Rough House, the city's only stage combat studio, the workshop ran

from Friday evening, January 26 through Sunday afternoon, January 28. The Rough House was founded just one year ago by Actor\Combatants Carl Campagna, Corinna Bryant and Jeffrey Coates.

While various stage fight classes have been held there, this was the first time it had been used for a workshop of this size. Seven teachers and

twenty-five students, plus weapons, in 2,480 square feet of floor space.

"Stupid Sword Tricks in Small Spaces"

Master David Woolley, with skills honed by years of working in Chicago's notoriously tight theatre spaces, led the students through two hours of advanced sword techniques in "Stupid Sword Tricks in Small Spaces", the workshop rkshop's opening class.

Techniques included practicing slashes and moulinets while standing about six inches from the wall, and doing thrusts and parries without footwork, only a shifting of weight. It was a great way to kick off the weekend and it set the tone for the entire workshop. This session ended around 10:00 PM and many of the participants headed out to enjoy the Chicago nightlife.

"Aikiso and Judo with Stage Combat"

Saturday's sessions began at 9:00 AM. Starting off with a brisk warm-up to shake out the cobwebs, led by Stephen Gray, which segued right into his class: "Blending of Aikido and Judo with Stage Combat."

It was an excellent way to start the day; with a mixture of physical activity, and some exercises designed to get the brain working. This class introduced a new approach to stage fighting. Gray, assisted by Chuck Coyl, utilized some Aikido techniques that surprised everyone, demonstrating how using Ki — energy flow between two partners — could be used in the course of stage violence.

The unusual exercises included one partner allowing themselves to be easily lifted off the ground by directing their energy up through the top of their head, then preventing this same action merely by focusing their energy inward and down.

Another exercise was to combine your own energy with your partner's, with the goal of touching your forehead with your finger while your partner used all their strength to prevent it. These were lots of fun and loosened everyone up, both physically and mentally.

"Smash and Bash with Johnny Mac"

The next class was at the opposite end of the spectrum. John McFarland's "Smash and Bash with Johnny Mac" session was a great lesson in sword and shield techniques. John started it off right; with a warm-up that got



everyone into a "barbarian" mode. Students stormed around the floor, knees bent, keeping the weight low, growling fiercely at anyone who crossed their path; and being careful not to turn their back on anyone. For some students, this class marked the first time they had ever used sword and shield, but it made for an invigorating and challenging class.

"Making All Weapons Exotic"

After a great lunch break of pizza, Chicago Style, of course, it was on to more creative stuff. "Exotic weapons, or Making All Weapons Exotic" by fight teacher James Finney. Another thought-provoking class in a different vein. Every student had to provide their own "exotic" weapon. These ranged from the sublime — Sai, halberd, throwing knife, etc. — to the ridiculous — a shoe, a folding chair, or a rolled up newspaper (which makes a fantastic knap, by the way).

"Each class was unique in its own right and gave everyone involved some new ideas and techniques to practice and discuss."

The idea was to discover the unusual properties of the weapon that made it unique. Then to incorporate that uniqueness into the scene. The results were imaginative, to say the least, and, in many cases, uproariously funny. Did you know the scissors-like action of a folding chair's legs make a great capture weapon? The class then took these same concepts of uniqueness and tried them with a standard rapier or smallsword. Students found some new ways to wield swords (and I got some great ideas for a comic sword fight!).

"Chicago Barroom Brawl"

The last class of the day again made everyone again shift gears. Chuck Coyl's "Chicago Barroom Brawl" stayed with the theme of working in tight spaces; only this time with unarmed brawling techniques. This got a little exotic, too, going beyond just punches and kicks, into chokes, pins, and even a flip over the head and down the back! Nick Sandys was called on at the last minute when Chuck's assistant was unavoidably delayed. But he handled Chuck's "abuse" with ease and the session went off without a hitch.

"Rapier and Dagger on the Circle"

With only two classes scheduled for Sunday, warm-up started at noon, giving everyone a chance for a little extra rest after Saturday night in Chicago. There were still quite a few groans and gasps as Nick Sandys led the group through a brisk stretching routine and then went right into "Rapier and Dagger on the Circle."

Fighting on the circle was how the rapier and dagger were used in their own time period and Nick has done extensive research on the subject. Attempting cuts, lunges, and parries while moving in an arc proved to be a fresh technique to most of the class, as well as a considerable challenge. But it was one which was met with great gusto and "za!"

"Acting the Fight"

Last, and certainly not least, was Richard Raether's "Acting the Fight." Using the Edgar/Edmund duel at the end of "King Lear" as the theme, Richard had the class work out not only the techniques each character would use, but how they would react off each other, too. Ideas flew fast and furious as the students enthusiastically dove into the minds and strategies of the two combatants. It proved to be an exciting finale to the seven classes.

All too soon, of course, it was over. Many said their good-byes right away and headed off to the airport or train station to get back home. The rest of us stuck around for leftover pizza, beer, and SuperBowl XXX. Two TV sets were brought out, couches and floor mats were arranged for bleacher-style seating and we spent the evening cheering for our favorite team. The Cowboys won, of course, but I wouldn't want to be accused of rubbing it in.

All of the instructors did a wonderful job of making the weekend an enjoyable and exciting time. Each class was unique in its own right and gave everyone involved some new ideas and techniques to practice and discuss. A well-earned round of applause also goes to Carl Campagna and the Rough House for hosting this event. "It was an incredible success!" exclaimed Carl, Rough House President. "Twenty-five people fighting for three days, there were no 'no shows,' and nobody got hurt."

It's a pretty good bet that most of this year's participants are already looking forward to the next year's workshop.



Lawrence Woodhouse is a Chicago-based SAFF member and a frequent contributor to the *Fight Master*.

What makes for good fight direction?

Here is a list of the questions that can help you decide the answer.

BY
PAYSON
BURT

"Does the momentum of the production stop for the fight? Or does the fight flow seamlessly from the world of the play?"

In New York it's the Tonies and the Obies; in Chicago it's the Jeffs; in Washington D.C., the Helen Hayes Awards and in Philadelphia, the awards for theatrical excellence are known as the Barrymores.

Recently, in Philadelphia, SAFF member Darla Max was nominated for fight direction of *Treasure Island*. Philadelphia members of the SAFF, led by Payson Burt, took this opportunity to encourage the Barrymore jurors to add a permanent category for fight direction.

Toward that end, they developed a list of questions to enable a lay-person who knows nothing about fight direction (just as the jurors are not set designers or dance choreographers) to come to an informed decision with regard to fight direction.

- For a period show, is the fighting historically appropriate?
- Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts? (Is the overall impact of the fight greater than the individual elements?)
- Does the momentum of the production stop for the fight? Or does the fight flow seamlessly from the world of the play?
- In the events leading up to the violence, was there a clear escalation or heightening of tension or was it an explosion of violence?
Was this choice dramatically effective?
- Is the rhythm boring or exciting?
- Do the way the characters fight match their character and body type?
- Is the action committed?
- Is there a sense of danger?

Note: A dazzling display of athletic ability does not constitute good fight direction.

DIRECTION

- Does the fight direction serve the play? (does it add to the emotional environment of the play or is it gratuitous?)
- Does the violence inappropriately propagate stereotypes or violate cultural norms?
- Do the actors seem to be struggling to perform overly complex fight direction, or do the fights allow the actor to reveal circumstance and character?
- Is the character that is fighting consistent with the rest of the play?
Do the movement choices reveal such things as: time period, financial status, occupation, personality, bravery or amount of martial training.
Afterward, have we learned anything about the characters from the experience?
- Does the fight direction tell a clear story? Does that story fit into the world of the play?

SAFETY

- Do you fear for the characters in the play, or do you fear for the actor's safety?
- Do you, as an audience member, ever feel in danger?
- Are there any weapons thrown or kicked toward the audience?
- If guns are used, are they ever pointed toward the audience?
Are they too loud for the space?

MECHANICS

- Can you see the "technique," or was it an effective illusion? (eg. The clapping hand which made the sound is seen on a strike, or you can tell no contact was made with the punch because you saw air in between the fist and face.)

2. The sound of the fight — is it interesting to listen to the fight?
If music is used, is it used effectively?
3. Is the staging imaginative?
Are sets and props used to best advantage?
Does the staging make effective use of basic directing tools such as positions of power and submission?
Are height and depth used?

“Is the fight too bland or too repetitive? Is it too slow to be realistic? Is it a flurry of moves without any chance for the audience to be involved?”

4. Focus: Do your eyes know where to look? (This is especially important in battle scenes or brawls.)
Do you feel like you missed important moments?
5. Is the fight too bland or repetitive?
Is it too slow to be realistic?
Is it a flurry of moves without any chance for the audience to be involved?
6. Do the weapons match the needs of the story and character! (If the Scottish king came out on stage for his last fight with Macduff holding a small fencing foil in his hand, this would effectively diminish the character and the dramatic tension.)

STYLE

Fights may be presented in either a realistic or non-realistic style. Realistic fights often appear spontaneous and out of control. These fights, very difficult to create and maintain, grow organically out of the life of the play and, in a very serious way, propel the action.

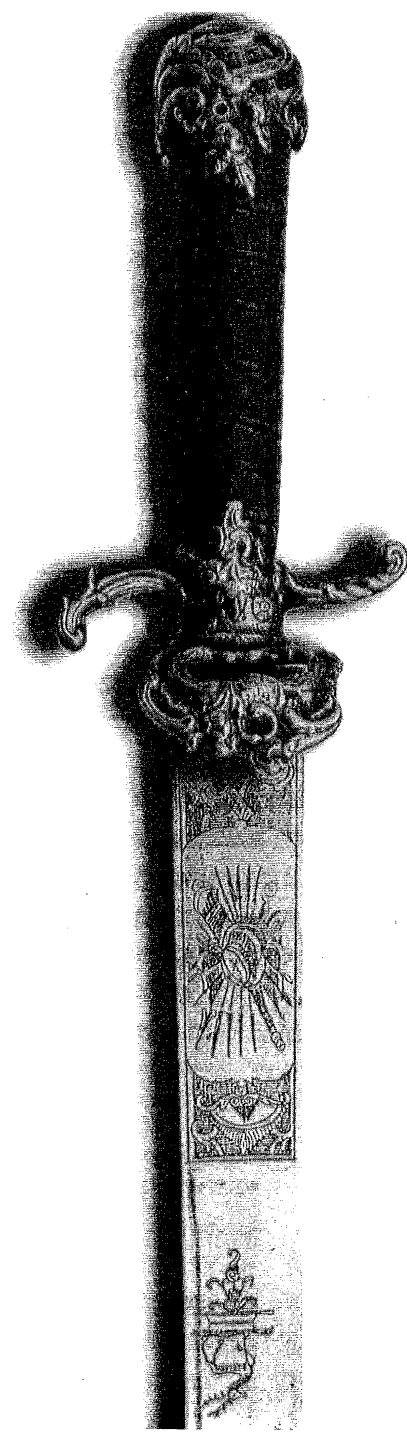
A non-realistic style could be anything from a slow motion fight to a modern dance piece. These fights incorporate mood, intuition, and often, audience expectation.

One unique example of an non-realistic style is the spectacle; a juicy showcase of athletics and romance. The adage: “that would not happen in real life” is ignored here while the audience is treated to a musketeer laughing cavalierly in the face of danger while fighting off five guards, drinking a glass of champagne, and reciting poetry to a beautiful woman.

1. Is the style of the fight consistent with the style and spirit of the play?
2. Did the fight’s style provide any new and different insights into the play, or was it ineffectual?
3. Does the style of the fight support the relevance of the play?



Payson Burt is a certified teacher in the Philadelphia area.



Exercise your way to a much stronger grasp of your choreography and your character.

BY
JAMES
CHEATHAM

Acting the fight: a series of exercises

THERE HAS BEEN MUCH TALK LATELY ABOUT the need to raise the standards of acting for actor/combatants. I, for one, am a little unclear on the focus of this argument. Are we talking about combatants’ acting skills regarding text etc., before they begin a fight, or their inability to act the violence convincingly? If it’s the first problem, let’s recommend a good acting class. If it’s the second problem, then I think we need to be more attentive as instructors to basic acting skills as they apply to combat.

Reminding actors about the basics

Even good actors need to be reminded of the basics once the technical complexities of stage combat are added to a scene. Following is a series of exercises that I have developed in the classroom.

I teach stage combat at the American Music and Dramatic Academy in New York City. In the four-semester training program I’ve set up, two full semesters are dedicated to unarmed combat. The first semester is designed to give a strong technical base in beginning unarmed skills. The second semester includes more advanced techniques, but is primarily focused on integrating detailed acting work into the violence.

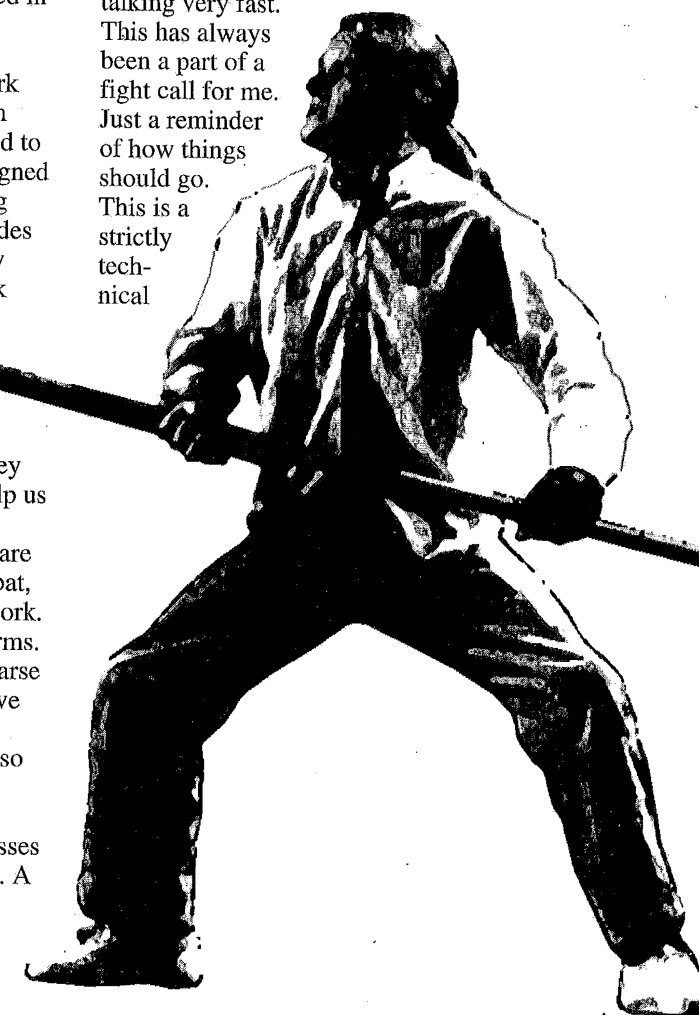
The following exercises are some that form the core of this semester’s work. Use some, use all, change them as you like. I’m sharing them in hopes that they may be useful to you. Perhaps they will help us take a small step toward our goal of better acting in our violent scenes. The exercises are designed to be used in unarmed stage combat, although they can be applied to weapons work. I’ll describe them, however, in unarmed terms.

As we all know, it is important to rehearse a fight scene over and over and over until we can do it in our sleep. Sometimes that’s the problem. Actors do the fight in their sleep, so to speak. They concentrate so hard on the technique (timing, masking, pace, etc.) that they forget to act. What the audience witnesses in such cases is choreography, not violence. A lot of grunting and yelling may spice up a fight, but it can’t take the place of believable, specific acting.

For first time exploration of these exercises, I recommend having the fighters learn a piece of choreography in advance. They should be able to execute it well at performance speed. Then have them explore these exercises. In this way they will be able to appreciate the differences in their performances, before and after the exercises. (Later on, once they have mastered the exercises, it is certainly viable, and beneficial, to explore the elements of these exercises while choreography is being learned.)

TECH-TALK EXERCISE

The actors execute the fight at ¼ speed while describing *without pause* everything that they are doing technically — moving very slowly, talking very fast. This has always been a part of a fight call for me. Just a reminder of how things should go. This is a strictly technical



exercise, but it lays a good base for the acting exercises to follow. The actors should execute the fight slowly and well while describing in as much detail as possible everything that they do, or should do.

Describing in detail

For example: if the actor throws a round-house punch, he or she does not get away with saying "I'm winding up and punching him." First, the actor isn't really punching his partner so he shouldn't describe it as such. Secondly, it's too brief. At true 1/4 speed the actor should have time to say much more. For example:

"I'm looking at my target; I'm making a fist; I'm shifting my weight and winding up far to the side; I'm drawing my fist through the chin nice and level, letting my follow-through linger..."

Notice that the running commentary begins before and continues after the punch. Actors should *not* stop talking! They should pause only to catch a quick breath.

"Frustration is common with all these exercises. Remind your fighters that the nature of this work is challenging."

Since we are always doing *something* in a fight, the actor should always be describing it. Even if the actor is waiting for their partner to throw a punch, there is still much to describe:

"I'm making sure I'm in a good fighting stance. I'm getting my hands ready for the knap, I'm watching my partner, looking for his eye-contact. I'm shifting weight to my right foot. I'm breathing deeply..."

Filling holes

If the actor has a hole in his commentary, point that moment out to him so he can fill it in. This exercise is not easy. One has to pay close attention to all the details of the technique that we have worked so hard to integrate. Often actors catch themselves taking something for granted, perhaps realizing that something important is being missed ("Oh yeah, I need to check my target there.") Frustration is common with all these exercises. Remind your fighters that the nature of this work is challenging.

Keeping it slow

Again, I stress that is incredibly important that the following acting exercises be explored in 1/4 speed. First — for safety's sake; the performer's attention will be focused primarily on the experiences and thoughts of their character, while still executing clean and safe technique. No area should suffer significantly. Secondly, if participants go too fast, they deprive themselves of making specific discoveries. We're trying to explore the human mind's emotional state during a fight, a frightening, potentially life-threatening situation.

The reality is that when people find themselves in a life-threatening situation they think very, *very* quickly. People are often surprised afterwards at how clearly they thought or how calmly they responded. It is instinctive survival mode. If you've ever taken a bad spill, you may have felt that you were falling in slow motion. That's your mind kicking into hyper-drive.

Imagine you are alone at a bus stop late at night. A man approaches. As he reaches for his pocket and looks at you, your mind races:

Ohmygodhe'sgotaknife — or a gun! Should I run? No, no sudden moves ... maybe I'll just walk away. Maybe I'm overreacting, Ohmygod he's smiling at me; he's going to kill me or rape me! Should I call for help? Why didn't I take that self defense class?! Ohhh...he's offering me gum.

In stage combat we are not actually in fear of our lives (hopefully). There is no adrenaline rush to get us thinking at hyper-speed. So, in order to create a truthful inner life, we slow the fight (to 1/4 speed) and create as many detailed thoughts as possible. Remember that the bus stop monologue would've taken your brain under two seconds! The first exercise deals with only a specific part of that life and death thought process — the selection of targets.

TARGETING EXERCISE:

In 1/4 speed, combatants call out the targets as they discover them. This exercise, like those that follow, is entirely from the *character's* point of view. Calling the target must coincide with the character's thought process. Thus, the target must be called *before* any physical action is taken to attack. Idea first ... then action.

For example: the first technique in the routine is a hairpull. The character must say "hair" before reaching for their opponent's hair. This seems ridiculously simple on paper. It seems simple in demonstration. It gets hard as one really tries to break down the thought process specifically. "Hair" must be called out not only before one pulls the opponent's hair, but before even *reaching* for the hair; before, in fact, the fingers begin to spread in expectation of reaching for the hair. Be specific.

Since this is the first move of the fight, some decision-making may be possible. Perhaps the character chooses "nose" (considering a punch to the nose) then another target, before deciding upon the perfect attack — "hair." (Perfect because it is the only attack that the choreography allows them. But the character must discover this *in the moment*.) Elsewhere in the choreography there may only be enough time to choose one target. This sense of immediacy will certainly feel differently than the decision-making moment just described.

Perhaps the choreography dictates that three steps are taken toward the victim before the hairpull. The character would then choose a target before ever shifting forward for that

first step. The first target might not be "hair." The first impulse might be "cheek" (a slap), but, once the attacker gets in range, and before making any move toward the hair, the attacker must change their mind and call out "hair."

Being specific

As with all acting exercises, the challenge and the hard work comes from being tough on yourself to be specific. I like to help actors by identifying late choices with a simple vocal buzzer sound, "ehhhhhh!" (an "I'm sorry, Mrs. Watson, that answer is incorrect" type sound.) [Important: Making choices is such a personal process for actors that it is difficult to label choices "wrong." However it should be the goal of the educator to help the actor to make the *strongest* possible choice, at the most opportune moment. In this example, a character might well take three steps without any clear idea of the intended target, but the attack, even the walk, are stronger when a clear choice is made.]

Performers follow these guidelines even when they don't attack. Using our example of the three steps into a hairpull: what if, while our attacker is still deciding, "stomach... face ... hair," the victim (who has no foreknowledge that he's about to *be* a victim) is thinking "face... groin... shin!" Only the victim does *not* attack because, before he can go for the shin, the attacker is reaching for his hair. The point is, just because the choreographer hasn't given you an attack, your character needn't be passive. Look for these opportunities.

Notice that the fighters are not saying "hairpull" or "back-hand" or even "slap." The *character* needs to discover targets; we can assume that the *actor* already has a stage combat vocabulary.

Once the target is chosen, the type of attack is a natural progression. In a real fight, if I see a kneecap as an open target, I'd make the most logical attack. If standing, I'd probably kick it. If kneeling, perhaps punch or grab at it.

"This feels fake."

In this exercise I try to deal with a common actor's complaint: "this

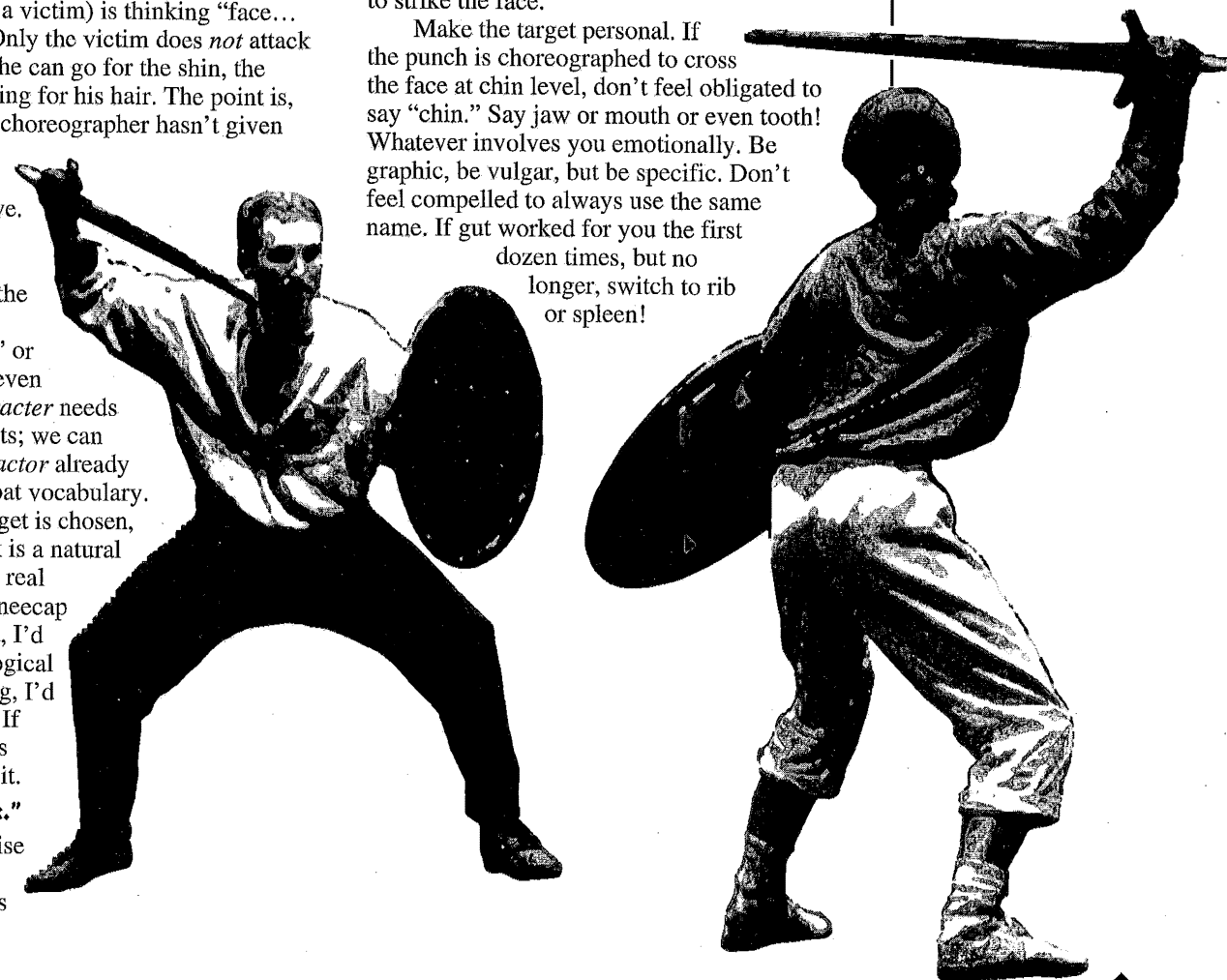
feels fake." If your character wants to punch someone, but the choreography has you clapping your own hand (ie. a slip hand knap), then of course there is an emotional let-down. I explain it like this. In this world, your hand is their face. (The acting term for this is *translation*.)

"If your character wants to punch someone but the choreography has you clapping your own hand ... then of course there is an emotional let down."

In a real fight, throwing a real punch, there are technical things I have to pay attention to (keep my guard up, watch my target, make a good fist, etc.). In stage combat we pay attention to just as many, and often similar, technicalities.

If my real punch connects, several things may occur (I'll perceive a moment of contact, perhaps even hear it, and I'll see my opponent reel.) If my slip-hand knap punch is successful (if it is done well), my character perceives all the same information. So in this exercise, once your character decides "face," you lock your focus on your hand, which now *is* their face! Thus we marry the technical requirement of looking at your hand, and the emotional urge to strike the face.

Make the target personal. If the punch is choreographed to cross the face at chin level, don't feel obligated to say "chin." Say jaw or mouth or even tooth! Whatever involves you emotionally. Be graphic, be vulgar, but be specific. Don't feel compelled to always use the same name. If gut worked for you the first dozen times, but no longer, switch to rib or spleen!



Notice that we use one word to describe the target. "Face!" rather than "I'm going to hit you in the face!" We're after a specific thought, a moment of discovery, the split-second when your brain goes "aha!" in the midst of a fight. Anything longer than a word makes the moment less clear. Remember, we're dealing with only one specific aspect of the thought process.

"Don't whisper ... Commit! Theater is exciting only when we make bold choices."

Let your voice reflect how you feel about what you do. Don't whisper. Whispering is like cursing under your breath. We all do it, but it's very different than saying that same oath clearly to someone's face—or yelling. Commit! Theater is exciting only when we make bold choices.

Making the less obvious choice

Choices don't have to be obvious. For example, if our hairpull is followed by a punch to the face, the character may not choose "hair." The character may call "face" before taking those three steps toward the victim. Now, in the character's mind, the hairpull is simply a set-up for real attack—the blow to the face.

Do we *have* to make a choice? Aren't there times when a character just lashes out? Certainly. You may choose that your character *doesn't* make a specific choice... but that is also a choice. (Be cautious of overusing this.) Each variation helps personalize each fight, so that the same choreography takes on a unique shape based solely on the choices of the actors.

Stay at ¼ speed! If actors go too fast they end up either calling out the moves *as* they do them (ehhh!), or stopping the flow of the fight to insert the thought. Actors must learn to think quickly while still keeping their fight fluid.

DANGER- PERCEPTION VOCALIZATION:

While in ¼ speed, the fighter must identify the *exact* moment they become aware of attack and the degree of danger. This is accomplished with any open vocal "Ahhh!" Again, thought must precede action. A move of resistance or protection must be preceded by vocal recognition of danger. (This exercise works well in conjunction with the targeting exercise.)

Let's stick with the hairpull. The attacker places a hand on the victim's head, the victim secures the attacker's hand by placing his or her hand on top, and basically acting as if their hair is being yanked. The victim puts her hand on her partner's for two reasons: to make sure that the victim is in control of the action (for safety), and to ensure that the attacker's hand doesn't slip off (to preserve the illusion).

In the world of the character, the victim puts her hand on her attacker's to prevent him

from tearing her hair out. Bringing her hand up is defensive. Before acting, the defender must *first* recognize imminent danger and a need for defense. The victim must *first* vocalize (aahh!), *then* raise her hand (not simultaneously).

If the hairpull is preceded by three steps, the victim might see those steps as an attack. The victim begins vocalizing as the attacker approaches, and continues right up through the hairpull. (A very long "Aaahhhhh!") Another choice may be to not recognize an attack until the last moment. Maybe the victim misinterprets the attacker's steps as friendly (especially if the attacker is purposefully misleading); reaching towards the victim's hair could be a nice thing. However, a specific moment *must* come when the victim recognizes physical jeopardy. This is when vocalizing begins. There is lots of room for interpretation as to when danger is perceived, but the moment must come *before* the victim's hand moves, or before her body flinches.

Deciding between valid choices

Spotting danger from afar, discovering it at the last moment, or any time in between are all valid choices. Find a choice which involves you to the greatest extent, and helps you fulfill the specifics of the choreography. By that I mean, if you decide (in our hairpull example) that your character senses danger immediately, but can't figure out why you hold still for so long, maybe that's not the best choice for you. Or you can explore that choice further... maybe you attempt to turn, duck, or try to prevent the attack, but ultimately your hair gets pulled. Any of these choices make the fight more dynamic, because now it is detailed specifically from your character's point of view. (If your choice significantly changes the fight, clear it with the choreographer. Most choreographers/directors want actors who make active choices.)

With the hairpull, a moment of perceived danger definitely occurs, because the technique dictates it. The hand must come up; it comes up in defense. Other techniques leave far more room for interpretation. You may perceive danger well in advance, notice it at the last moment, be surprised by a blow that you never sensed coming. Your character's reactions to these experiences will be distinctly different.

As in the targeting exercise, let the vocal sounds reflect your character's emotional life. If you perceive a blow coming well ahead of time, your fear will mount as you get closer to disaster. Let your vocals climb emotionally. You may not have enough breath left for a big vocal reaction to the blow once it arrives. That's fine for the purpose of this exploration.

The value of trouble

Get in trouble! If you play it too cool, convinced that your character isn't really afraid, then you deprive yourself of a great acting opportunity. Theatre is all about obstacles. The

greater the obstacles, and the struggle to overcome them, the higher the drama. Which sports event is more exciting, a landslide victory, or a back-and-forth struggle? What's the victory in breaking a choke that's no threat? The more you empower your attacker, the stronger you appear when you break free of that choke.

Fighting from need

"Real" danger frees you to act. Instead of trying to recall what move is next, react! The more danger you're in, the greater the need to escape and the higher the elation when that happens. Get in trouble so you can really set up those reversals. Fight from need as much as possible. Fighters need to win.

Do these exercises simultaneously, with each character switching from targeting to danger perception, to targeting, throughout a fight. Be hard on yourselves to be accurate.

As fighters begin connecting to their emotional life, they'll speed up. Remind them to slow down, but acknowledge that the reason they're speeding is because they are identifying with feelings of fear and need. It's the point of the exercise and should be praised.

INNER-MONOLOGUE EXERCISE

This is a standard acting exercise. Both actors say out loud every thought and feeling that their characters are going through during the fight. Movement is still ¼ speed.

Inner monologue should build on the discoveries made in the previous two exercises, including the *precise* moments when a target or a danger is discovered. Instead of "I'm going to pull your hair!" (too long), the actor should say something like, "Hair! I'm going to grab a handful and yank it out by the roots!"

Find that moment of discovery, and detail it. Make it personal. Danger perception should be verbalized. It's okay to begin awareness with a sound. Sometimes "Aahh!" is descriptive and appropriate. But if that danger awareness continues for any length of time, it should be spoken: "Aaahh! She's trying to pull my hair out. I can hear it tearing! Oh no! Now she's going to punch me in the face!"

Speaking the character's thoughts

This exercise builds on the skills learned from the tech-talk exercise. Actors should talk quickly and continuously, while maintaining the fight in ¼ speed. They should say several things about each technique, but now entirely from their character's point of view. Both monologues happen simultaneously.

As in the tech-talk exercise, at times actors will find it hard to talk continuously. There will be holes. Words are an expression of their thoughts. Remind them that in a genuine life-threatening moment (like a fight) they'd have a hard time keeping their thoughts from racing. Quite the opposite! So keep talking.

The best source for this tirade is your partner. Observe him keenly, as in a real fight. Everything you do, or attempt concerns him. The success of any attempt can only be learned by watching its effect on him. Your survival depends on how you react to what he does. The pain you feel is *because* of him and is significant in the way it affects your ability to deal with him. Never forget the importance of the person opposite you on the stage.

Detail the pain. Don't say "Ow, my face!" Where *exactly* were you hit? What's the damage—bruised or broken? Did you hear something crack? Is your tooth loose? Can you taste blood? Are your eyes watering? Are you dizzy? If you'd really been hit, you'd know the answers to all of these questions almost immediately. Your character should be equally informed. Explore the senses: feel, taste, hear, even smell the details of pain.

"Get in trouble! If you play it too cool, convinced that your character isn't really afraid, then you deprive yourself of a great acting opportunity."

In life you may be injured and not feel the pain until later. Often on stage we use this to justify long fights, or what should be incapacitating blows. However if we rely too heavily on this, we end up with a fight where actions have no consequences; an exchange of blows with no sense of struggle. Obstacles create drama and pain is a huge obstacle to success. (It ends most fights.) When both characters fight on despite pain, it becomes an intriguing battle for domination! (see *Rocky II*.)

Detailing the inner monologue

Stay away from cursing. True, you might think it and say it in a fight. But "Oh shit oh shit oh shit" doesn't add much to your inner monologue. "Vulgarity is a weak mind trying to express itself."

Watch out for exposition. "You killed my sister so I'm going to..." might be the reason the fight began, but once it's on you'll need to focus on the immediate here and now. This is called being "in the moment."

After working these exercises carefully and thoroughly at ¼ speed, have the fighters internalize the inner monologue, and execute their fight at performance speed. Those inner thoughts will color each fighter's experience in a very unique way. Each fight, as a result, will be subtly distinctive. Overall, these exercises should help the fight feel more real for the actors. If they believe what they are doing, then we, the audience will believe it as well.



Jamie Cheatham is a certified teacher based in New York.

Teaching: Academia vs. the "Biz"

Teaching stage combat to working actors can be a real school of hard knocks.

BY
MICHAEL
G. CHIN

I TEACH STAGE COMBAT FOR THE New York Fight Ensemble. Together with my fellow Certified Teachers Ralph Anderson, J. David Brimmer, Robert Tuftee, and Ricki Ravitts, we train working actors how to fight.

I also teach for the Pan Asian Repertory Theatre here in New York City. Both NYFE and PART are professional actor training programs catering to people already in the business, as opposed to university situations. As a matter of fact, the only teacher from the NYFE group who also teaches at a college is Mr. Brimmer, who teaches stage combat at New York University.

Working with working actors

I enjoy teaching on a professional level. All of our students at NYFE and PART are working actors, some union members, some not. They've all had at least some professional theatrical exposure ranging from non-paying, non-Equity showcases to Broadway shows, films and soaps. Therefore, actors who come to us for classes are primarily looking for combat instruction; they're not seeking acting class.

The reality of the situation is that a working actor in New York, in common with most actors, is strapped for cash, and will be judicious in the way he spends his money for training. He will take acting class, voice class, scene study class, and somewhere down the list (perhaps fifth or sixth) he may invest in stage combat class.

"... somewhere down the list (perhaps fifth or sixth) he [the working actor] may invest in stage combat class."

Most of our students hold down steady jobs between acting gigs, so all of our classes are held at night. All of the students have had some previous college education and the average age is late twenties to early thirties. However, one enterprising seventeen-year-old

high school junior managed to take my rapier and dagger class. It seems he saw one of my flyers and signed up. By the time I realized his true age there were only two sessions left. So I kept my fingers crossed and prayed he wouldn't get hurt so that his parents wouldn't sue us.

It had never dawned on me that someone under twenty-one would sign up for classes at NYFE. To his credit, he was focused and did extremely well.

The students

Eighty percent of NYFE's students come to us because of some connection or exposure to the area Renn Faire. The New York Renaissance Festival in Tuxedo, N.Y. has been a godsend to NYFE. We have a very good working relationship with them and the Artistic Director there insists that actors hired to fight at the Faire, fight well, and they acknowledge the SAFD certification.

Catalyst and Symbol

The remaining twenty percent of NYFE classes are made up of previously certified actor/combatants, who are honing their skills; people who have just moved to New York and have been referred to us; and/or actors who

desperately need to "learn how to fight for an audition or call back."

At PART, ninety percent of my students are Asian American actors, many fresh out of college, who have gravitated to PART in hopes of rounding out their theatre training.

While, currently, I am not teaching on an university level I have, in the past, filled in for Fight Master David Leong at Julliard, worked with Fight Master Fracher at the Burt Reynolds Institute and conducted workshops at the University of Tulsa, University of Texas, New York University, St. John's, Brown University, NY State Theatre Institute, and Pace University. So, I also have experience teaching stage combat to college students.

The collegiate profile

Generally speaking, college students who take stage combat classes are theatre majors in their late teens to early twenties. Many take stage combat as part of their all-around theatre education — it is one of the requirements for their major. Fortunately, more and more universities are stressing the acting aspects of the stage combat curriculum as well as the combat skills.

Making a choice

There are many pros and cons to teaching academically and professionally. If I had to choose between the two I would lean ever so slightly towards teaching professionally. Why? In a simple word: Focus.

Simply, the student who works hard for a living and then chooses to take that money and give it to you will come to your class because he wants to. He has made an investment, literally, of time and money. He will come motivated to learn. In turn, as a teacher that psychs you to give your all.

Conversely, when you have to take attendance; ask students why they have missed two classes in a row; beg them to warm up before class so that they will be prepared to start on the hour; and then yell at them to pay attention it takes a toll.

In a gross generalization, the difference between teaching on a college level and professionally is that professional students take your classes because they want to and college students take your classes because they have to.

Different expectations

Professional students have some idea of what to expect. They are a little bit older,

have had some experience on the stage and cannot afford to miss classes for which they've just spent \$300.

College students will tend to get bored after the first class because they're not slashing and cutting. Hence, at times, I find myself putting forth the effort to entertain college students more than instructing them. I have to come up with motivational/theatrical games to augment my teaching of combat skills.

Now, before you start sending letters to the *Fight Master* and condemning me to a Purgatory of training has-been actors, there are some definite problems with teaching and training professional actors.

Drumming up business

The biggest hassle with having one's own school is hustling to get students. This is particularly true in New York, where as I noted, stage combat may be low on an actors priority list of classes.

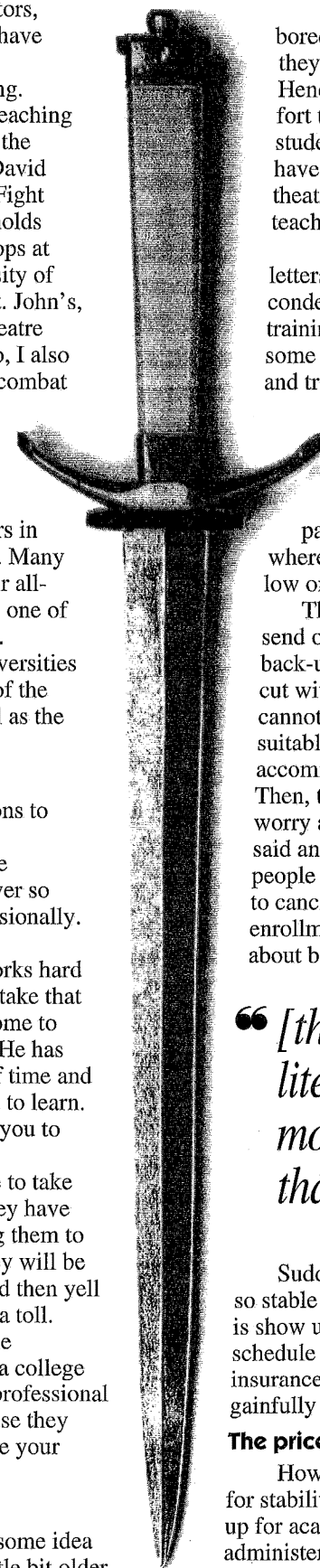
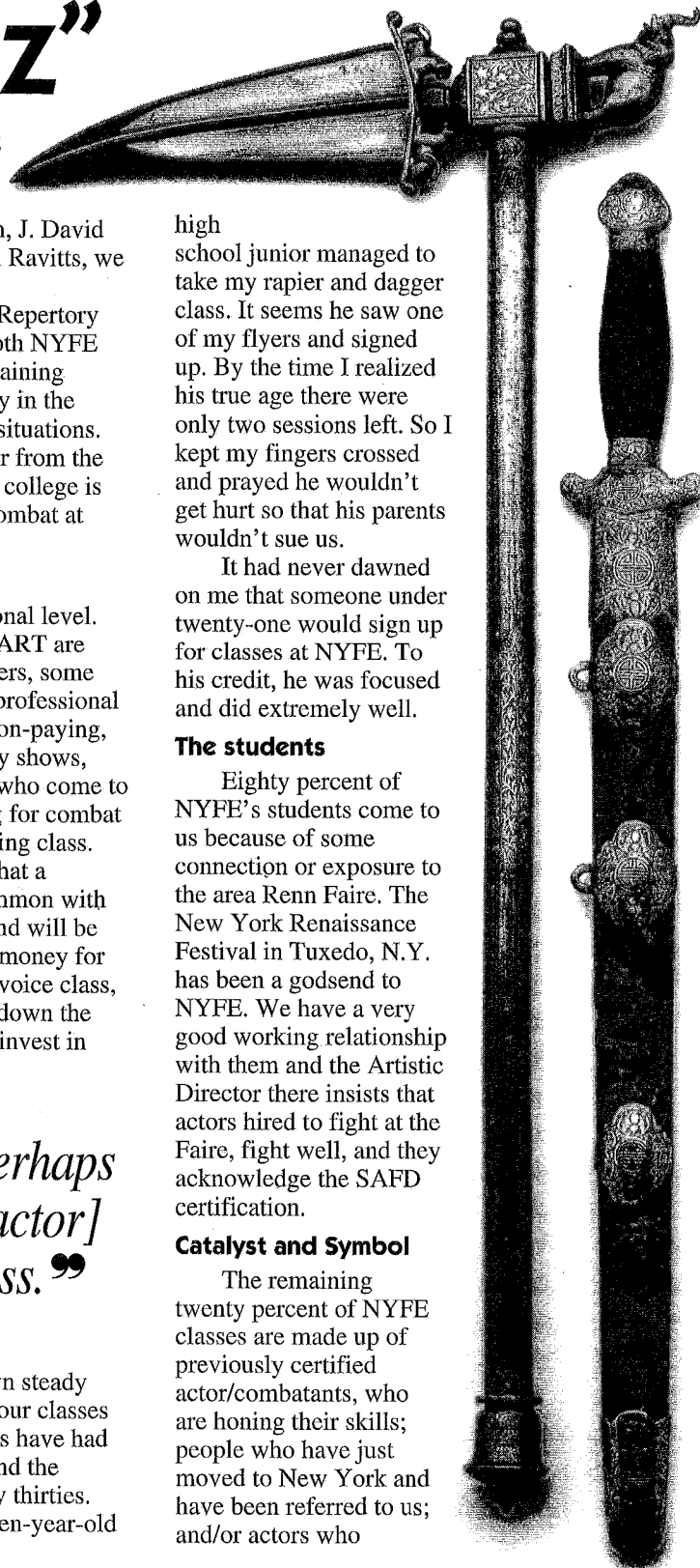
There are hundreds of flyers to send out, numerous phone calls and back-up phone calls to make. Deals to cut with worthwhile students who cannot afford full tuition. You must find suitable rehearsal space. You must accommodate people's work schedules. Then, too, you provide weapons and worry about insurance. And, after all is said and done, you may have only four people sign up. Many times we have had to cancel classes due to lack of enrollment. I don't even want to talk about bounced checks.

"[the student] has made an investment, literally, of time and money. He will come motivated to learn. In turn, as a teacher, that psychs you to give your all."

Suddenly, a college situation seems so stable and civilized — all you need do is show up prepared to teach. Your class schedule is set. Weapons are provided and insurance is taken care of. And you are gainfully employed for 13 weeks.

The price of stability

However, there is a price to be paid for stability. One must follow the rules set up for academia. Take attendance, administer written exams and adapt your teaching style to suit the policies set by the



theater department. In essence you must be held accountable.

When you have your own school, other than the guidelines set up by the SAFD you can do whatever you want and charge whatever you want.

"Been there, done that"

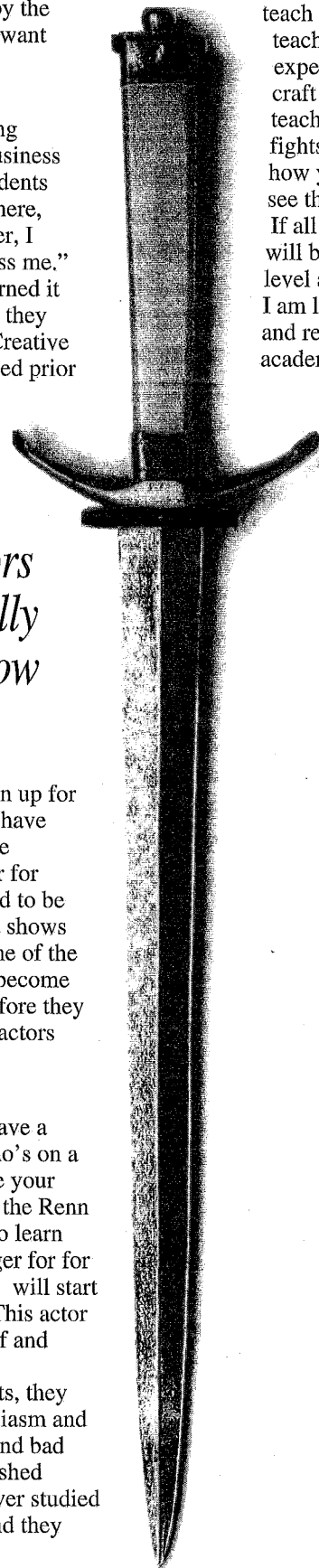
Another downside of teaching students who have been in the business for a while is that often these students are jaded. They have the "been there, done that" attitude. "Okay, teacher, I already know this stuff — impress me." "Excuse me, that's not how I learned it in so and so's class" (God forbid they are members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, or that they received prior training from people whose technique differs from the SAFD). Or the comment that irks me the most: "Don't give me acting notes!"

The biggest payoff

Basically, what I'm saying is that as a teacher one cherishes the chance to teach anywhere. It is why we *are* teachers. It's great to teach experienced actors how to hone their craft and it's equally fulfilling to teach young students how to act fights. Regardless, of where, what or how you teach the biggest payoff is to see that you've made an impact. If all works out, come Fall of 97, I will be teaching on the undergraduate level at Pace University in New York. I am look forward to the challenges and rewards of teaching both the academic and professional arenas.



Michael G. Chin is a certified teacher based in New York City.



"It's great to teach experienced actors how to hone their craft — it's equally fulfilling to teach young students how to act fights."

Occasionally, actors will sign up for a class because they believe you have some casting influence. Being the resident instructor/choreographer for PART, my classes inevitably tend to be bigger during the years that fight shows are scheduled in our season. Some of the actors very legitimately want to become familiar with fight techniques before they audition for me and some of the actors want to "schmooze" me.

Professional panic

Professional students may have a different agenda. The student who's on a timetable because he plans to use your class as a springboard to a job at the Renn Faire or who desperately needs to learn everything about rapier and dagger for for his Tybalt callback in two weeks will start to panic when he "can't get it." This actor is putting undue stress on himself and everybody else in the class.

In defense of college students, they will show up with a lot of enthusiasm and physical skill (fewer bad backs and bad knees). They have no pre-established prejudices because they have never studied with any other fight instructor and they relish acting notes.

Aldo Nadi reigned supreme with a sword in his hand during the 1920s and 1930s, winning his first title at the age of twelve.

BY
LINDA
CARLYLE
McCOLLUM

The greatest swordsman who ever lived...

HE WAS THE LAST GREAT PROFESSIONAL fencing champion of the twentieth century and was considered the greatest swordsman who ever lived. Aldo Nadi was a superchampion whose highly publicized fencing exhibitions attracted thousands of spectators. By literally crushing his adversaries on the fencing strip, he eventually exhausted his supply of challengers. No one wanted to fence him since their inevitable loss would be devastating to their fencing career.

A family of fencers

Born in Livorno, Italy in 1899 to a family of master fencers, he and his brother Nedo were taught as children by their father Giuseppe Nadi, a famous fencing master who coached Italian fencers for over fifty years. Aldo Nadi began fencing at the age of four and won his first title at twelve.

At the 1920 Olympics Nadi won three gold medals on the Italian Team in all three weapons and a silver in sabre in the individual events with his brother Nedo winning the gold. He always remained second to his brother until, at the age of 34, his brother Nedo retired as International Champion and Aldo succeeded to the title.

French vs. Italian

In 1922 a foil contest in Paris was arranged between the twenty-two year old Italian Aldo Nadi and the French fencing champion, Eucien Gaudin, to settle the dispute over the supremacy of the rival schools of fencing. At this time Gaudin was considered the greatest fencer in the world. This match drew over seven thousand spectators with three thousand being turned away. It was a spectacular

occasion with music, preliminary exhibition bouts by the leading European fencers, and a performance by the Comedie Francaise.

A questionable score

Aldo lost the match to Gaudin 20 to 11, but the score was not genuine. Judges called "Halt" to legitimate beat lunges by Nadi who was using the Italian foil which easily disarmed Gaudin who was using the French foil. There were questionable calls by judges who seemed blind to clean hits against Gaudin even when Nadi's foil had to be straightened after the hit.

There was also a temporary rule framed prior to the 1920 Olympics which allowed hits on the sword-arm above the elbow, even when there was no deliberate shielding of the body. This rule remained in effect for this match. Six of the ten hits scored by Gaudin were to the upper part of Nadi's extended arm in the second part of the match.



“His fencing encounters throughout Europe were gala events accompanied by banquets, champagne and beautiful women.”

Turning professional

It was at this time that Nadi turned professional doing exhibitions matches for large sums of money (which he quickly lost in the casinos of Europe). His fencing encounters throughout Europe were gala events accompanied by banquets, champagne and beautiful women. Fencing experts called him the “Virtuoso of the Sword.” He was a marvel of speed, grace and precision. The speed and brilliance of Aldo’s footwork enthralled all who saw him.

This elegant and boastful young swordsman became known as the “bad boy” of fencing. He casually took on all comers in his fencing exhibitions, be they professional, amateur, Olympic or European Champions and beat them soundly. While his opponents trained intensively for these matches, Nadi would take only a couple of weeks prior to the exhibition to prepare himself for the fencing exhibition.

Coming to America

In 1935 Nadi moved to the United States and made his American debut at the Plaza Hotel in New York under the auspices of the Amateur Fencers League of America on December 12, 1935. His foil exhibition with George Santelli of the New York Athletic Club was described as “classic in design and execution.”

Nadi deplored the lack of interest in fencing in the United States. “No student can learn fencing without much hard work,” he wrote, “but the rewards in health, well-being and pleasure are well worth the effort.” He eventually retired from fencing exhibitions.

Changing the Rules

It was Nedo Nadi’s match in 1925 with the famous French master Rene Haussy that resulted in a clarification of the fencing rules.

Haussy scored with a remise on Nedo’s riposte by disengagement. Both of the contestants claimed priority.

After heated controversy, the International Federation ruled that a riposte by disengagement has “right of way” over a remise provided that it is executed immediately and without any withdrawal of the sword arm.

In 1943 he moved to Los Angeles where he opened a fencing school on La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles. His prowess with the sword brought him to the attention of the film industry and he began to supervise fencing scenes in motion pictures.

Making the move to film

In Europe he had been the star of the 1928 silent film *The Tournament* (Le tournoi dans la cite) directed by Jean Renoir. In the United States he created the fencing choreography for the Daphne du Maurier pirate story, *Frenchman’s Creek* with Basil Rathbone and *Captain from Castile* with Tyrone Power. (He also had one line as the body guard in the Humphrey Bogart film *To Have and Have Not*.)

Nadi felt strongly about the differences between competitive fencing and stage or screen dueling. “Anyone with two legs and one arm — and no brains — can put on a decent stage duel in a couple of weeks while it takes years of very demanding work to become a mediocre competitive fencer.”

In his autobiography, *The Living Sword*, Nadi makes numerous comments on film duels. His scathing remarks are meant to set the record straight as to the value and validity of Hollywood swordsmanship.

Everyone’s a critic...

Since fencing is an art that is many centuries old Nadi felt it was impossible for someone who was not a great fencer to pretend to be a great fencer. He found Jose Ferrer’s duel in *Cyrano* to be utterly silly and a far cry from the legendary skill of Cyrano. After seeing Gene Kelly’s fencing as D’Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers*, Nadi wondered how Dumas’ bones could remain in his grave.

But for Nadi the duel to end all duels in *Scaramouche* was the greatest travesty of all on the art and science of fencing. He felt it was an utterly ridiculous spectacle that crudely offended one of the noblest arts and sciences in the world. No duelist in his right mind would ever consider fighting on such terrain as the top of orchestra seats, or being precariously balanced in air or leaning out of boxes or dangling from ropes while fencing.

His greatest outrage was directed toward the monotonous and repetitious cutting of the ropes on stage which held the scenery so that it would fall on one’s adversary defiles the dignity of the sword by degrading it to an ax. Men armed with swords use these weapons to kill, not for dropping scenery on their opponent. For Nadi these people had obviously never heard of the traditions, glamour, glory and dignity of the sword.

Fencing training for actors

Nadi advocated that all actors make fencing as part of their permanent program of

education. He encouraged producers to give enough time in advance to rehearse the duel with a competent teacher and that directors should not interfere with the fencing master’s work. Nadi believed that the director’s ideas concerning the duel should always be sifted through the fencing master.

A masterwork on the foil

In 1943 Nadi wrote his fencing treatise, *On Fencing*, which is considered a masterwork on the art and science of the foil. Not only is *On Fencing* a model of fencing instruction, it is also an entertaining swordsman’s-eye-view of mankind. Besides its wealth of technical and tactical advice, his insights into the psychology of combat are revealing and are helpful for the actor/combatant.

“Fencing is the sport of gentlemen ... It is the Fencing Master’s strict moral duty towards his artistic ancestors to see to it that centuries-old traditions are respected, honored, and enforced.”

Aldo Nadi, the guardian of this great tradition, died in his sleep in his home in Los Angeles in 1965 at the age of 66.

People have paid up to one hundred dollars for a copy of Nadi’s fencing manual. Out of print since World War II when its copper plates were diverted to the manufacture of munitions, *On Fencing* was reprinted in 1994 by Laureate Press.

Aldo Nadi’s autobiography, *The Living Sword*, completed in 1955 but lost for nearly 40 years has been edited by Lance C. Lobo and has also been published by Laureate Press. It is a captivating look at fencing in the 20’s and 30’s in Europe and the United States.

Just as we labor over understanding Marozzo or Silver today, some scholar four hundred years from now will probably study Nadi to better understand the fencing style prevalent in the early 20th century, before the introduction of electrical scoring. Here it is today for our own edification and enlightenment.



Linda McCollum is a past editor of the *Fight Master*, a frequent contributor, and serves as the on-site coordinator for the NSCW.

“On the ground”

In his book, *On Fencing*, Aldo Nadi recounts a duel in which he took part. His opponent was an Italian fencing critic who had fought in five previous duels. Both men met at dawn, accompanied by their seconds and two doctors. The following is excerpted from Nadi’s words.

The difference between the duelist’s and the fencer’s psychology is best appreciated “on the ground.”

As soon as you are stripped to the waist, the chilly morning air makes you think: “Even if I come out of this in good shape, it wouldn’t be a bit funny to die of pneumonia.”

The extreme sensitiveness of the moment makes even the slight difference in the weight of the *épée*, without the customary button on the tip, very noticeable.

Before putting on your glove, your seconds fasten a white silk handkerchief to your wrist. “What for?” “To protect the main arteries.” You don’t like the explanation.

The doctors meticulously sterilize both weapons, and it is then, and only then, that you realize that the other fellow too is armed with a blade exactly like your own. You cannot help looking at its fascinating point, and its needle sharpness reminds you that it can penetrate your flesh as easily as butter.

“Gentlemen, on guard!”

[Aldo’s opponent attacked immediately and Aldo counterattacked. Both were wounded, but Aldo refused to halt the duel and fought on, enraged.]

“Enough,” my adversary said. Quite! My one wound was beginning to make itself felt. My valiant adversary appeared to be bleeding from everywhere. That evening, he and I drank champagne together.

Aldo Nadi demonstrates a lunge.



Fight direction used to expose character and theme

Shakespeare provides a rich fund of storytelling moments that illuminate the text and enrich the characters through the medium of stage combat.

BY
DR. KATHY
BIESINGER

THE PERVASIVE SENSE OF CONFLICT FOUND inherently in virtually all of Shakespeare's works is clearly a "well" of resource material for exhilarating as well as insightful fight direction. Conflict is a key source in the bard's creation of dynamic comic characters. Clearly defined conflict sharpens the issues, whether political or psychological in both history and tragedy.

Combat possibilities

When citing great fight scenes from Shakespeare, several come to mind where both text and subtext imply a wealth of combat possibilities to the fight director. The "taming scene" from *Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, has only a few lines that actually describe the nature and kind of the physicality inherent in the "courtship" between Katharina and Petruchio.

There are a few phrases that suggest physical conflict such as: "Come sit on me..." or "Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?" and "I'll cuff you if you strike again." But, the scene could be played with very little actual physical contact.

Because of the established tradition of physicality in the scene, most directors find it irresistible to go all out in "exploring" the various implied elements of combat in the scene. "Best beware my sting..." can hardly go without the punctuation of some kind of attack.

When I first directed *Shrew*, I was surprised at some of the inherent content and rich thematic strains that were playing out vividly and visually because of physical nature of the scene. The combat itself gave the characters a kind of freedom to express themselves in the extreme.

I was simply surprised at how appropriate and connected to the text the "non-verbal" communication was. Seeing the potential to expose character and thematic depth through contact and combat has led me into an exploration of what else could be done to enhance the audience's understanding of the rich Shakespearean content.

Physicality on all levels

From that time, I have made an effort to study the use of physicality on all levels to help expose the character, text and story. Clarity is always a concern when dealing with classical text. I had also been working for a number of

years as a Shakespeare text coach, and I found it increasingly useful to have the actors move in order to free their deeper, subconscious grasp on the content. It seemed only appropriate that every resource where the deeper meaning of the text can be exposed must be explored.

When I watched the work of competent fight directors, I was surprised by how much "content" in terms of character development I was getting from the actors. The "storytelling" potential of fight direction became so obvious. I found that the combat itself became a tool.

Combat as a storytelling tool

Weaponry, with its complex system of strategy and skill really "did something" for the actors as a vehicle for expression. I could see who was the better strategizer, who was impulsive, who was technical and methodical.

I thought of how often I had seen directors pay no attention to what the fight director was doing... exhibiting a "they have their job, I have mine" philosophy. I saw fight direction as a powerful tool for a director, one that should not be given away without incorporation into the essential "meaning-making" structure of the director's own work.

As You Like It

When directing *As You Like It* for Santa Barbara City College some years ago, I wished to clarify and visualize a certain thematic element. I was impressed that this light-spirited comedy had threads of profound meaning and deeper themes, including "man's inhumanity to man". The cruelty between family members in the first act is often treated as just "exposition." After all, it's a comedy, and we wouldn't want to mislead the audience.

The banishment of the Duke by his brother, the physical abuse between brothers Oliver and Orlando, Frederick's jealousy and consequent mistreatment of his niece, all had a potentially explosive nature in the text itself. I was asked to set the play contemporarily, which enhanced the relevance of domestic violence. This particular theatre department had a huge, elegant main stage, but opted to relegate Shakespeare to the actor's studio. Good. It gave me the intimacy I desired to develop the subtle and intense conflict that surfaces in only a few places textually.

The danger inherent in this play is set up in the earlier wrestling scene where Orlando overthrows the usurping Duke's champion. These are supposedly men at play, but what falls out of the friendly match for Orlando is the end of life as he knows it. He is exiled. The danger below the surface becomes tangible. As director, I felt that I would not do justice to the text if the threat of violence, cruelty, and inhumanity was not clear. I began looking for places where it could emerge.

I had several SAFD-trained actors, including Sean O'Shea as Orlando, and Ivan Pelly, who was trained and had experience as a fight director. The danger in the "city" was shown as the wrestling scene degenerated to a street fight, showing the violence in the society.

The threat of the woods

I talked at length to Ivan Pelly about the kind of threat I wanted the "woods" to hold. The forest of Arden is supposed to be a refuge. Although it is a place of exile, it is also a place of safety from the usurping duke's wrath. The lead characters seem protected by the forest, as the comedic line of courtship unfolds.

Interestingly, when an antagonistic character enters the forest, such as Orlando's brother, Oliver, the hidden danger is manifest. Oliver is attacked by wild animals. This isn't shown, but reported, as Shakespeare often does. I wanted the threat to be sudden, visible and visceral. Ivan and I devised an unwritten scene, stealing lines from Orlando's "report" that would show rather than tell about the attack on Oliver.

The attack on Oliver

We set the attack at night. One of the banished duke's men appears; one that we've come to trust. He distracts the searching Oliver. Other bandits appear behind them. They signal each other from behind the trees, and move in as he seeks their help. A punch to the gut, then repeated blows to the face, etc. show these "merry men" of the banished Duke in another light, crossing the expectation of the audience. A pulled blade ends the attack, with Oliver sustaining a thorough beating. The audience, at this point, probably feels it is well deserved.

When Orlando enters, he fights off the thieves and helps his "traitor" brother escape. The twist in the story is immediately clear. The play is about the redeeming goodness of those who can forgive. Orlando does not return blow for blow, but receives blows for his brother's sake, in a literal visualization of his "turn the other cheek" philosophy.

The added fight sequence enables us to see the subtext emerge. The potential danger of the forest and of the society becomes a reality to the audience, endowing these light-hearted comic characters with a kind of courage and moral

force that dignifies their later kindness to those that have wronged them. The forgiveness is all the more profound. Text and visualization are balanced so that the audience could be the most effected by the power of the story.

"Orlando... fights off the thieves and helps his 'traitor' brother escape... The play is about the redeeming goodness of those who can forgive."

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Later, I directed the first production of the Santa Barbara Shakespeare Festival — a highly physical, highly expressive production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Sean O'Shea and Ivan Pelly were both involved again. We had worked together before, which helped, and also shared a kinship in our philosophy about how effectively



movement and combat could be used. We also had the advantage of University of California BFA students, trained in movement by James Donlon, and in combat by Jane Ridley.

“The light-hearted love chase turns to an all-out brawl, where the blatant superficiality and vulnerability ... proves an effective backdrop to later view the deeper issues.”

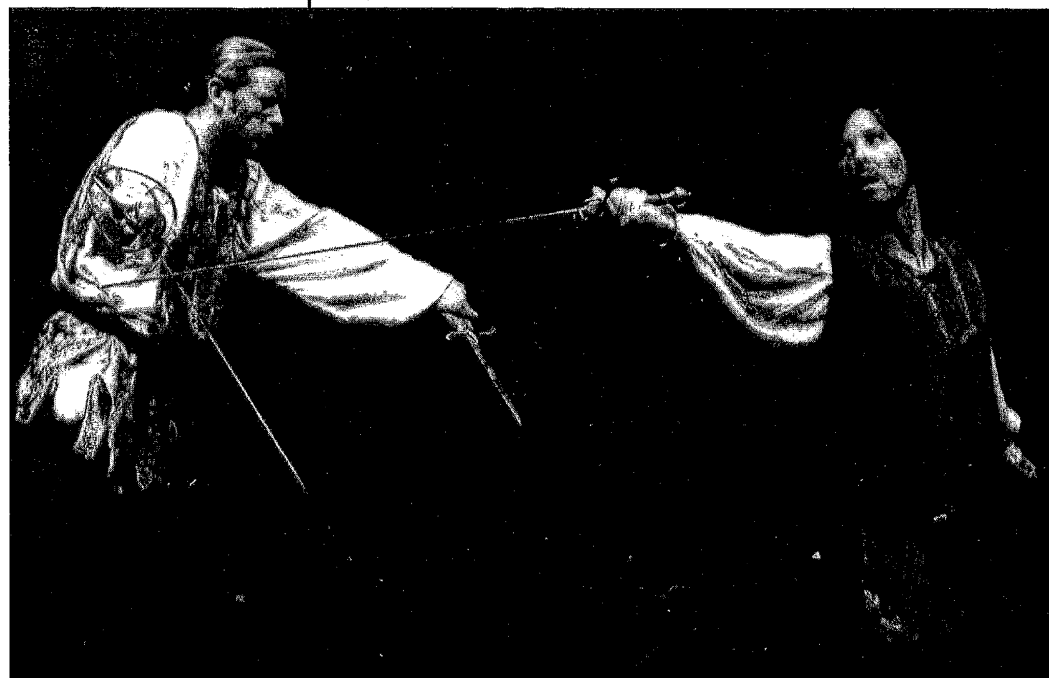
Lovers' quarrels

The atmosphere that was created proved exceptionally fruitful, particularly in the lovers' "fight" sequence in Act III. The two couples, Lysander and Demetrius, who have been once friends and are now hostile rivals in Hermia's love, have both been tricked by Oberon's "love potion" into worship of the spurned Helena.

The light-hearted love chase turns to an all-out brawl, where the blatant superficiality and vulnerability (they are such easy targets for the fairies' pranks) proves an effective backdrop to later view the deeper issues of what constitutes real love versus infatuation.

The scene, as directed, started with stumbles and falls, showing to the audience right away that the characters were not on stable footing physically or emotionally. It quickly progressed into an all-out brawl, where all four characters, as well as Oberon and Puck, were in continuous contact with someone else. There was heavy combat as well, unarmed, and utilizing the boys' Roman short swords. But, the combat was carefully planned to be expressive of the fickleness and extremities inherent in the rich social commentary of the text.

The deep emotional strength of Hamlet (Sean O'Shea), right, prevails in combat against the better-skilled but underhanded Laertes (David Biesinger), left.



One reviewer called the piece a "truly no-holds barred production ... Professional wrestlers have nothing on these actors as they leap, roll, pummel each other in a rollicking frolic." The point is not just energy for the fun of it, but directing that energy to the purpose of exposing what is deeper in the text.

Heightening the "heroic" effect

Another power that I found stage combat added to the dimension of the director's work is perhaps more obvious. Combat has the power to heighten the "heroic" effect of the play.

On the stage, in particular, the few become symbolic of the many. Symbolism has a weight and force with the audience. It is the force of recognition. The heroic effect of combat will clearly be much stronger if the relevance of thematic elements are drawn out.

For instance, the battle between MacDuff and MacBeth symbolizes opposing forces, political, tribal, personal, even universal in the conflict of good and evil itself. It is an awesome responsibility for a director, and likewise an awesome opportunity. Shakespeare himself sought the most effective means to reach the audience with the power of the story:

Can this cockpit hold the vasty fields of France?
(*Henry V*, I.i.)

Shakespeare hoped to provoke the audience's imagination to the dimension that he felt and envisioned. Today's director clearly competes with the powerful film medium, where audiences are mesmerized by the power of conflict and even violence now made possible. Editing techniques, make-up, and the technical effects, make whatever could be done on a stage, dwarf by comparison. We live in a society that has experienced as near as possible a certain reality of physical contact and conflict that has been possible heretofore only first hand.

Competing with film

Gregory Hoffman, SAFD certified teacher, and I were preparing to work on the 1994 production of *The Lion in Winter* for the Santa Barbara Shakespeare Festival. I wanted the audience, early on, to sense the unsettling notion that the fate of nations and the future as we know it was hanging on the shoulders of these fiercely selfish, though powerfully unique individuals. I wanted the sense of violence to compete with the power of editing in film.

As long as the combat revealed powerful ideas in a realistic way to the audience, it would never be gratuitous, but integral to the meaning of the play. That is what could replace the "effects" machinery of the film industry.

In as much as I could complete effectively the journey of exploring and exposing the layers of meaning and significance in the text, the conflict would be moving, through the amplification of a well drawn, compelling "scenario." The combat needed to be absolutely believable, but also to ring with symbolic resonance. The forces would register in their intended power, personally for the actors and symbolically in the story. I was led to seek other non-traditional, non-textual contexts in the production where the element of combat could be used to lead up to or amplify the climactic conflicts.

Physicalizing conflict

I watched my actors early on, looked deep into the text to find inherent conflict that could be physicalized and exposed. This would be easier with the a psychologically intense production the quality of James Goldman's *The Lion in Winter*.

I intended to demonstrate the explosive filial tension between these three brothers (all potential kings of England). The bitingly witty dialogue had an "edge" to it, and I wanted to wake up the audience to the explosive situation (who's to be King?) from the first scene.

Gregory assessed the abilities of SAFD-recognized David Morgan (John) and Ivan Pelly (Geoffrey), and plotted a broadsword fight, starting the action of the play prior to Act I, scene 1. Lines were stolen from Act I, scene 2 on their entrance into the main hall:

Geoffrey: After you...
John: After you...
Geoffrey: No, after you...
John: Alright, have it your way... after me.

John's purposely imbecilic, inane pestering of Geoffrey heightens to a competitive blow is struck. Finding the conflict irresistible, Geoffrey strikes back, John mocks him repeatedly, hiding in and out of the castle archways and finally chasing off stage.

The first lines between Henry and Alais then begin amidst the clamoring. The brawling John and Geoffrey blunder into the Act I, scene 1 dialogue between Henry and Alais repeatedly, swinging swords in a "bash and miss" fashion. They shout out particularly character revealing lines such as "Father always liked me best," stolen out of later scenes. Their last interruption ends in a faked injury, where John flees to "Daddy" Henry for protection and sympathy.

Once Henry is gone, the "after me" argument resumes between John and Geoffrey predicting the futility of expecting resolution of conflict between these characters.

Making characterization visual

Characterization became visual in the relationships, tactics, methods of each of the boys. Richard Lionheart enters. Observing the matched wit and menace between John and Geoffrey, he stops the conflict with a definitive, "No, after me..." knocking John to the floor, his sword at John's throat. John tricks Richard into looking away and escapes. The cat-and-mouse game has begun.

Hamlet

In last season's SBSF production of *Hamlet*, I worked with Sean and Ivan once more, with Gregory's fight direction. I cast SAFD-trained actors in as many roles as I could. Laertes (David Biesinger) had the all attitude of a reckless teen. I wanted to capitalize on his youth and insecurity to increase the danger around Hamlet early on.

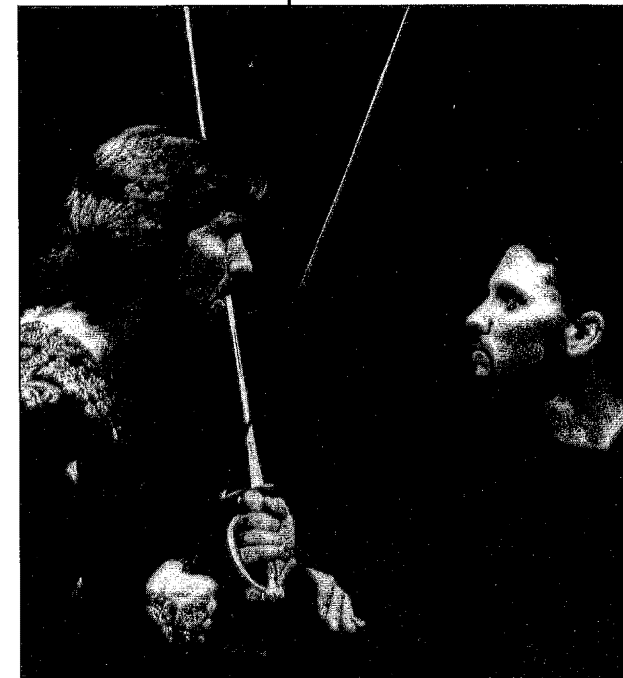
Gregory directed a masterful final rapier and dagger fight that maximized Hamlet's (Sean's) mature strength and focus against young Laertes' "wild card" recklessness and vanity about his skill. I wanted to tell that story throughout the play, rather than just at the end, in the unmistakable terms that combat can create. I established what Gregory calls "vignettes", or scenes where combat can be used to develop character in their journey through the play.

“I established ... “vignettes” or scenes where combat can be used to develop character in their journey through the play.”

Act I, scene 2 opens at court. I added a short but aggressive rapier and dagger bout featuring the "ambassadors" who have lines later in the scene. The fighters are clearly trying to impress. The sense of competition for Claudius' attention and favor gives visual cues about his popularity and hold on public opinion. The contrast between the sleek young men that Claudius surrounds himself with and the melancholy, withdrawn Hamlet is clear.

The fight also establishes a precedent for the later Hamlet/Laertes bout. We see betting on the fight, showing the materialistic values of Claudius' realm. The commission to travel

Combat storytelling: Hamlet (Sean O'Shea) and Hortaio (Justin Bowler) in Act V.



to Norway as ambassadors comes as a reward for victory. The swordplay introduces a sense of physical danger into the play early on. The superficial nature of the society is epitomized in Laertes, whose showmanship far supersedes his judgement. This is obviously a particular interpretation of the text, but it serves as an example of how profound an effect combat choreography can have on the deeper thematic development of the play and its meaning.

“If a director is a storyteller, then I feel that this aspect of story ... is one that I hope to tell with added immediacy and eloquence.”

In Act II, scene 1, Laertes “picks a fight” at the docks while saying his farewells to sister Ophelia. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are shown arriving from their voyage, greeting Ophelia as the scene opens. Laertes, in this production shown as a younger brother, steals Rosencrantz’ sword and proceeds to demonstrate his skill. The audience “gets it” that Laertes is a hot-headed, impulsive show-off.

Painting a family portrait

The story of doting father and spoiled son is revealed. Polonius, superficially scolds his wayward son for holding the ship’s departure. Polonius shouts “Yet here Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame...” Those lines are taken out of context and put at the top of the scene, so we see Polonius excuse his son’s folly. In contrast, he will momentarily be seen as almost abusive to Ophelia. The portrait of family relationships is complete, amplified by the addition of Laertes’ heedless instigation of competitive violence.

Later, I wanted to increase the audience’s awareness of Hamlet’s physical danger as he is “packed off” to England. I added a scene where we actually see the pirate ship attack Hamlet’s vessel as he is in route to England. We see Hamlet manipulate the situation and dupe Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. A lot of the “reporting” lines can then be cut.

Claudius’ web

In Act IV, scene 7, Claudius spins a careful web around Laertes, enabling him to be caught and destroyed by his own pride. Claudius pulls Laertes’ rapier from its sheath and examines it. He strikes at Laertes, creating a mock-fight with him, while Laertes is defenseless. This demonstrates Claudius’ skills and proves his worthiness as a mentor in Laertes’ life, but also foreshadows Claudius’ deadly intentions. Laertes is defenseless against his sophistry.

In the final act of the play, the rapiers are on display through the “foreshadowing scenes” before the actual conflict between Laertes. The rapiers are smuggled in by Marcellus as the

messenger, so Hamlet will have the advantage of warming up. As Hamlet tests his skill on Horatio, we see his “readiness” for the conflict. Hamlet teases the tedious Osric with his blade. Sean found resourceful ways to humiliate and surprise Osric with his blade. The rapiers were a tool of expression that also represented the increasing danger. Hamlet’s resentment is seen, and his readiness to strike. Then the rapiers are laid secretly with Laertes “poisoned” weaponry. The rapiers never leave the stage during Act V.

Macbeth

I directed *Macbeth* for Actor’s Repertory Theatre Ensemble in Utah, one of my best experiences to date. The long, fairly incomprehensible scene between Malcolm and MacDuff in Act IV is often cut to pieces or just ignored. I sat down with the fight director, D.C. Wright, and worked through the meaning in the text and why it is essential to the story.

MacDuff here is extremely unstable, torn by divided loyalties, not knowing whom to trust. Malcolm has been accused of murdering his father, the King. MacDuff tests Malcolm’s loyalty and his guilt. Insightful Malcolm plays to MacDuff’s doubts by portraying himself as the darkest of characters. At the point of despair, Malcolm restores MacDuff’s faith in both himself and in the nation.

I set up a natural situation. Preparing for battle, they practice with broadswords. As the actors rehearsed the lines, and played out the clarity of each moment’s “tactics” and responses, a natural choreography developed that was set by D.C. Audiences could see MacDuff become enraged, frustrated, or despairing by how he responded in combat “practice.” The lines, including the manipulative strategy of young Malcolm, became much clearer. A wonderful flow developed and a strong correlation between text, emotion and physical response.

Fight direction as a tool

I respect fight direction and the great tool that it is for the director. I trust and value the casting of trained fighters, particularly those with SAFD recognition. I cast trained fighters repeatedly. Eventually, I opted to study the full course of SAFD training. Personally, it was highly rewarding. I experienced the character responses, had to function “in their skin” under the pressure of real weaponry.

If a director is a storyteller, then I feel that this aspect of story, so prevalent in Shakespeare’s plays, is one that I hope to tell with added immediacy and eloquence. Through my own training, I gained a new vista for exploring the resource-fulness of combat in exposing character and theme.



Get that big ball moving and hone those combat skills. It’s more Killer Ball!

BY
PAYSON
BURT

“Killer Ball is a wonderful arena in which [the students] can react spontaneously to a given situation, make a strong physical choice and trust in their technique...”

Killer applications for Killer Ball

KUDOS TO DALE GERARD AND J. DAVID Brimmer for their article on the use of killer ball in stage combat training! [*Fight Master*, Fall 1995] I have found this game particularly useful with my students at Temple University in Philadelphia, and would like to share a few other applications I use to develop specific attributes in those students.

Physical audacity

I spend the entire first semester teaching students to know their physical strengths and limitations. The work is focused on adding to their vocabulary of physical choices in any given situation.

Many options require them to deal with the ground in a fall, a partner, or obstacles around them. Their job is to balance all of these priorities for the moment at hand. Killer ball is a wonderful arena in which they can react spontaneously to a given situation, make a strong physical choice and trust in their technique to keep them safe.

the throw to their partner next to them, then do a beautiful (and safe) break fall to the ground.

Focus

I ask the students to be actively involved in every move of the ball. If the ball is thrown to the person standing next to them, they are there actively supporting their partner in case they are needed. If the ball is thrown across the circle, they are still involved with the catching and throwing of it because in the next moment, it might be thrown to them. They are constantly moving, shifting from side to side similar to a tennis player — sometimes facing the partner right next to them to remain involved in the play.

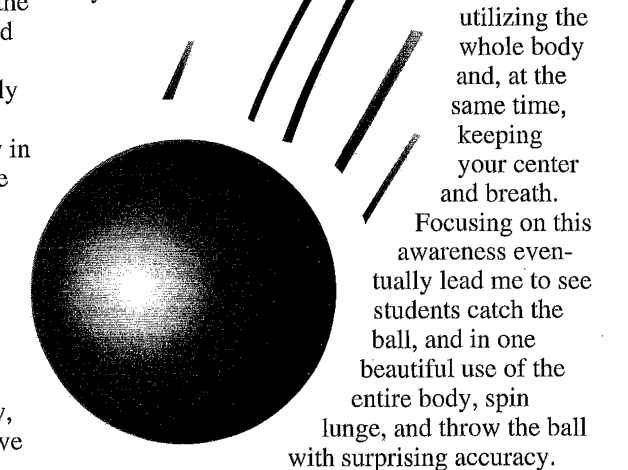
Whenever they are caught off guard (and you can tell) it is a focus or weight shift problem. If the ball is overthrown or the catch is missed, the point is how that student deals with the situation. Do they get flustered and make the problem worse, or do they do the next necessary thing quickly and efficiently to keep the ball in play?

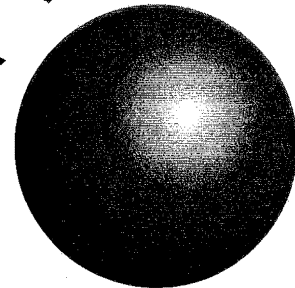
Balance and Feet

In conjunction with physical audacity, we focus on the use of constant energy output. If the ball is thrown to you, how can you catch and return the throw using the energy given to you while

Balancing the priority of their own and their partner’s safety, with the priorities of the game using communication (both verbal and non-verbal) is another major lesson I teach.

The exercise is for them to be constantly reminding themselves that they are only playing a game and it is not worth an injury in order to win, which translates directly to the illusions in stage combat. Making the priority not to let the ball out of the circle — stopping it and giving it to their partner, giving up the shot for the good of the entire group, if that is the only choice, is one way of building the stakes for the action. The result is that I see students leaping high into the air on a difficult throw, keep the ball in play, gently tapping it to give





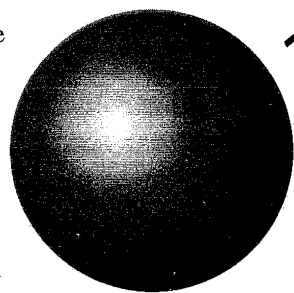
Problems like squatting to reach for the ball instead of stepping toward the ball may be immediately and repeatedly addressed during one session. Understanding the usefulness of constant movement as opposed to stagnant or dead movement is reinforced in this game. If you are moving from side to side and the ball is thrown to you, whether you are moving in the direction of the ball or not, you are one step ahead of the ball then if you had remained stagnant. If you are double weighted, you must first become active which requires a decision, then a weight shift, in order to travel towards the ball. However, if you are shifting away from the ball, you are already coiled and ready to react. If you are shifting toward the ball, you have an immense amount of time to get to the catch.

“... growth has always been constant and in every class I have taught, I have been treated to moments of physical brilliance, both individually and as a group.”

Physical audacity

I ask the students to move around on the circle. If there are only four people on the outside circle, they must move around in their little slice of the pie in order to attain a good angle for a throw or attack. If the ball is on the other side of the circle, the student must know that the ball is going to be coming to them next and adjust their angle to facilitate the throw.

Meanwhile, the circle as a whole must constantly adjust and cover any gaps that may occur. Each throw is part of the whole in terms of setting up the two people in the center for a hit. If you have the ball and are ready for a throw, it is useless to throw to the person directly next to you because that does not change the angle enough to set up a hit.



Understanding how a change in rhythm affects not only the possibility of a tag, but the rhythm of the outside circle is important. I have seen the outside circle become so intent on its own rhythm that it loses its objective and I have literally been able to rest in the center while the outside circle plays by itself.

The students must learn how to recognize when they are becoming a slave to the group rhythm instead of an integrated piece of a focused and well-oiled machine. This awareness is valuable for the students on the inside circle as well in order to modulate their energy output for the situation at hand.

Priorities and parameters

Using these priorities and parameters with my students allows them to enjoy an aerobic exercise and work on specific attributes at the same time. Their growth has always been constant and in every class I have taught, I have been treated to moments of physical brilliance both individually and as a group.

As a training device outside the parameters of a specific stage illusion, Killer Ball is the Best!



Payson Burt is a certified teacher based in Philadelphia.

Acting Tough

ACTING EXERCISES FOR ACTOR/COMBATANTS TO AID THE INTEGRATION OF ACTING AND FIGHTING

BALL GAMES



BY
J. DAVID
BRIMMER
and
DALE
ANTHONY
GIRARD



The previous column in the “Acting Tough” series dealt with the game “Killer Ball.” We felt that this game was something many members of the SAFD were presently using in their classes and thought that clarifying information might be immediately applicable to their classroom activity. For us, however, Killer Ball is usually the end product of a series of ball games used in the preliminary stages of class work.

We use the term “game” to avoid the students feeling that there is any predetermined end to the exercise. Instead of explaining, we let the students explore. Part of the process of these games is self-discovery. These games allow the students to investigate fundamental principals of stage combat without delving into mechanics and technique.

Making the step to physical acting

Physical readiness, focus, concentration, eye contact, communication, partnering, eye/hand coordination and so on are explored within these games. They allow the actor to make the step from analytical acting to physical responsiveness.

Although these are games, they require concentration and commitment. In the initial stages of these (and other) theatre games some actors tend to feel silly, tentative or judgmental. That’s all right, as long as they continue to push their boundaries and move forward.

“What’s this got to do with stage combat?”

There will be times during these games where different students will get that “what has this got to do with stage combat” look. When this happens the immediacy of the game is lost. The student is concerned about the product rather than exploring the process.

If they think what they are doing is silly or pointless, encourage them to delve into the game and see if the activity will answer their questions. In this situation Mr. Brimmer tells his students to “take the judge and put them in the witness box.”

“Through the stages of these games the actor will discover the art of learning from their actions instead of judging them.”

Students need to be encouraged to play the game, not analyze it. If they get an impulse during the game, they should go with it. They shouldn’t worry about how it looks, if it fits, or why the game is being played, they should feel free to commit to that action. They need to avoid censoring their responses, or planning their actions ahead of time.

Participants should explore, explode, expand, contract, take chances — simply, they should just allow themselves to play the game!

Through the stages of these games the actor will discover the art of learning from their actions instead of judging them.

Instead of telling — ask

In the process of the games, instead of telling the students what to expect, ask them what they have experienced. By *asking* students what they saw or felt instead of telling them what they are expected to learn from the exercise the process is more visceral and personal.

Personal discovery is a remarkable part of the acting process. When rules and techniques and textual information is forgotten, physical memory is retained. Like the process of riding a bike, a manual of fundamental skills is usually less helpful than practical experience and self discovery. Once you learn to ride a bike — you never forget (although explaining the process can prove difficult and confusing). With this in mind, we feel that the practical aspects of these games is to develop a personal understanding of the common aspects of stage combat in a way more apt for retention than memorized verbal definitions.

Play Ball!

For the following ball games the same type of ball is used as that described in Killer Ball. All these games will be played in a circle, although no one is in the center at this time. The students should be a couple of feet apart from shoulder to shoulder with everyone facing into the center.

Group Dynamics

The interaction of the group is important in these games. Time should be allowed to play the game, and for the group to discuss what they found. They should be encouraged to question (not judge) everything they do.

“Time should be allowed to play the game, and for the group to discuss what they found. They should be encouraged to question (not judge) everything they do.”

This teaches them a lot about themselves and allows them to discover a great deal more than can be painstakingly explained. It is important for everyone to keep an open mind for different people perceive different things. You, along with the students, can learn a great deal by hearing other people's responses.

THE NAME GAME

(a.k.a. TOSS ABOUT)

This ball game is often used as an ice-breaker at the beginning of a new class. In fact, many of our first classes begin with this game. After introductions and a brief discussion concerning what stage combat *is* (a conversation between characters when words fail and emotions reign that requires a command of the physical instrument and skills such as mime, acrobatics, acrobatics and acted aggression on the part of the actor) and is *not* (real physical confrontation and conflict) everyone is brought to their feet and told to form a circle.

Once everyone is “circled up” the ball is introduced. At first the ball is simply passed around the circle (either clockwise or counter clockwise) from student to student until it reaches its point of origin. After one or two passes around the circle the students are instructed to say their name as they receive the ball and before they pass it on.

Breaking the ice

If the students don't know one another, this serves as a quick ice-breaker, introducing everyone. If the students already know one another you may find it useful to move on after only a few passes of the ball. After a good speed is established in announcing names and passing the ball, students can begin tossing the ball across the circle, still saying their names before throwing the ball.

After a few minutes of tossing about the

ball, you will usually find the first signs of questioning the reason for this game. At this point the game should change to the “name game.” Now the students must say the name of the person to whom they are throwing the ball. The light bulb goes on and they say, “Oh, I get it, I'm supposed to be paying attention to this.” Without stressing the fact, they have learned the necessity for focus and concentration.

As the students begin the name game, invariably someone will stare at one person and then say and throw the ball to someone else, with the express purpose of “faking them out.” Let this happen a few times, and then use their choice as a springboard for discussion.

Once the students experience miscommunication they develop a better understanding of its necessity. Because the game (and stage combat) is not competitive there is no reason to surprise or fake out one's partner (we use the term partner rather than opponent).

The example also shows students the need to pay attention, observing all the elements of the action because new information can surface at any time. This is usually a good time to introduce the concept of eye contact and connecting with a partner over distances.

MIME BALL

Although “mime” seems to be a dirty word in many actor's vocabulary, pantomime is still a large part of the acting craft. The illusionary art of making what is unreal real and the invisible visible is used in varying degrees by all actors and is an integral part of stage combat.

The idea here is to set aside the real, visible ball and continue playing the name game throwing a “mimed” ball. As before, let the actor's play the game before interjecting specifics about the exercise. Invariably the ball will change size and weight, and take varying amounts of time to travel across the circle, from instantaneous materialization to extreme slow motion. Also at this stage the ball will generally travel on a uniform path.

Stopping for discussion

After the mime ball has made the rounds, and all of the students have had a chance to pass and receive the ball, the game can be stopped for discussion. Ask first what they observed, you will find that many of the problems and inconsistencies were noted by the students. To further explore their comments it is often good to go back to the real ball to demonstrate variety and what the ball, and the players actually do in the process of being passed across the circle. This shows

the actor that we do a variety of activities without understanding what or how these things are done. The creation of a reality through the use of information and imagination. If the students did not already bring the matter up, this is also a great place to discuss general physics.

Transforming the mime ball

The next step — and it is a big one — is to transform the mime ball into a lead shot-put weighing 10-12 pounds (6-7 kilos) and continue playing the name game, throwing it across the circle. The discussion from the previous round of mime ball can be carried into this portion of the game.

It is important for the student to play the game with an objective eye. They need to play being aware of what was learned earlier and what they already know about heavy objects and weight in motion. It is important to stress spontaneity. Students should be encouraged to take what their partners give to them and respond in the moment rather than preplanning an action or activity.

During these rounds students can discuss how the addition of weight raises the stakes and/or the investment in the activity. Comments can range from what the shot-put makes them do, believability, the cost of catching it, use of effort, use of sound, and the difference of reacting from the gut instead of from the head.

It is important that the students speak as observers, not as judges. Here they should identify specifics and analyze what works and what does not. This tones the student to be more precise, so instead of saying “that sucked” they can say “the ball changed size, weight, moved too quickly, etc.”

THE PAIN GAME

The final stage of these ball games is the “pain game”. * Here the stakes are again raised and the mimed process of the preceding games is taken to another level. The mimed shot-put is still tossed about the circle in the manner of the name game, only now the shot-put is throw at the person whose name is called, not to them. Upon making this statement you will generally find a variety of reactions.

The decision to change from tossing the shot-put to throwing it at someone needs to be made once the students have fallen into believing in the mimed shot-put. Once they are focused on the previous game, and are

responding truthfully to the task, the idea of throwing the shot-put at their classmates has a powerful effect. Usual reactions to this request range from disbelief to rejecting the idea.

Preliminary reactions

Before actually playing the “pain game,” it is important to discuss students' preliminary reactions. For their response says something about their character and their morals. How they react to the idea of violence being unwittingly thrust upon them is both a great learning tool, and a hindrance to the overall process of the game.

First, their reactions tell them something about how some characters might react in a violent situation, usually with hesitation, denial or fear. This is good information to use a later dates when exploring certain characters in violent or confrontational situations.

“How [students] react to the idea of violence being unwittingly thrust upon them is both a great learning tool and a hindrance to the overall process of the game.”

Secondly, however, their reaction is also impeding to the process of the game. By applying personal morals or perspectives to the actions and reactions of the pain game, the students limit their scope of experience. They judge the game rather than witnessing all its possibilities.

Every character is the result of their history and the energy of their dreams and cannot be forced into the existing structure of the actor. The character's past fueled by their personal goals is what makes each character different and distinct.

A warrior King, an Italian duelist, a royal prince all believe in specific things. They hold themselves differently, walk, talk, think, arm themselves, fight differently and respond to violence in wholly different ways. Their life experiences, education, physical mannerisms, morals, and beliefs are completely different.

“Embrace the game”

It is important for the students to release themselves and simply play the game. As Mr. Girard says to his students, “embrace the game, don't brace yourself for it.”

* It is important to note that these games are intended to be done in a series, one following the other. In fact, Mr. Brimmer refers to the entire series as the Pain Exercise, not just the final game. This is done because the Pain Exercise does not seem to provide the same enlightenment to the actor when introduced separately. The games are listed separately herein because they can be returned to throughout the class process as a warm-up or specific exercise.

Setting down the rules

Before beginning the first round, it is important to set down the rules of the game. Without stating expectations, it should be made clear that the students must still call their partner's name and establish eye contact prior to tossing the shot-put.

Once eye contact is established, the student throwing the ball should indicate with their eyes the target on their partner's body (specific objective) at which they will throw the shot-put.

"Everyone should be encouraged to take risks — not with safety issues, but with their emotional and physical commitment."

The recipient of the action must try to read the intent of their partner and take the "hit" accordingly. The shot-put can no longer be caught, nor can it be deflected. It must be allowed to strike the body and the recipient must play out the physical reaction that follows. With these simple rules established the students should play a round. Everyone should be encouraged to take risks — not with safety issues but with their emotional and physical commitment.

Usually during the first round someone will avoid the reaction by stepping out of the shot-puts way. This is a good place to stop and discuss what the students have observed. The work will generally be tentative, censored with more acting than reacting.

Going for the gut reaction

In the case of the student stepping out of the way of the ball, this offers an opportunity to show the difference between a mental choice and a gut reaction (visceral response). The evasion, and many of the other "responses" played in the first round are pre-planned and often disconnected from the action and intention of the student who is throwing the ball. Avoiding the shot-put is a smart idea, but the exercise is to be hit with the shot-put and react to that impact.

A good example to bring up is stubbing a toe or getting a paper cut. These examples are helpful because most students have experienced these types of injuries. In both cases reaction to the injury is immediate and uncontrolled. The vocal and physical reaction is spontaneous and devoid of any conscious process of thought. You don't think about hopping around and

howling — the body just reacts — it takes the brain a good 10–30 seconds to catch up and then decide to examine the wound and gain some composure. The observations of the students coupled with these examples lead back into the game.

Letting intensity build

Each round that follows the first becomes more focused and more intent. Physical reactions become more specific, physical degeneration is more apparent and the game becomes slower and tension is built in the waiting rather than in the doing. Students stay with and explore the pain rather than springing back to "hurt" someone else.

In one of the later rounds there is usually an example of a reaction that is a particularly truthful, powerful, visceral experience. Here the game should end and the students should discuss the reaction, their observations and experiences within the game. By showing them someone "in the moment" they can see the difference between intellectual choices and visceral responses.

In one instance, a student struck in the chest with the shot-put reacted appropriately with the upper body, and at the same time their left foot began twitching and tapping the floor. The mind would not necessarily think of that action as part of a response to being struck in the chest, but the body reacts naturally and can supply an infinite variety of sounds, breath changes and physical responses. The key in playing these games is for the student to center themselves — not censor.

Blowing off steam at the conclusion

After exploring the aspects of the "pain game," we usually let everyone blow off steam with a rousing game of killer ball. Here, as in the preceding games, we merely establish the rules and let the students play. Only after the game do we discuss the merits of the game and its application to the dramatic process. Nothing opens the students eyes wider than self realization- and nothing stays with us longer than those things we discover and come to understand on our own accord.



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Opinions expressed in "The Pen and the Sword" are those of the reviewer and may not reflect the opinion of the Society of American Fight Directors.



TEXT ON TEACHING FENCING AND THE DEFINITIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE ART OF FENCE AND DUELLING

BY
DALE
ANTHONY
GIRARD

FENCING AND THE MASTER by Laszlo Szabo

Budapest: Franklin Printing House, 1982, (ISBN 963-13-1275-5) Translated by Gyula Gulyas; 290 pages of text. Short bibliography; 120 b&w line drawing illustrations. Hard cover.

FENCING AND THE MASTER IS THE collection of over 50 years of teaching experience by Hungarian Fencing Master Laszlo Szabo.¹

Unlike most manuscripts concerning the sport of fencing, Maestro Szabo's text is not a technical manual on the mechanical execution and proscribed technique of foil, epee and sabre. Although mechanics, technique and proper execution are all goals of the text, it is a tool for the fencing instructor, not the student.

In the Foreword, written by the former president of the Canadian Fencing Masters' Academy, Fencing Master Stephen Vamos, the text is described as a tool designed "... to give direct pedagogical assistance to instructors on how to provide a solid grounding for their students as a precondition of future proficiency." Maestro Szabo has certainly met his goal.

Within 290 pages of text, Maestro Szabo effectively teaches the teacher practical methods for overcoming both simple and complex problems as well as correcting faults while developing a sense of distance, timing and rhythm in a variety of students.

The chapters, or sections of the text, are broken down into specific topical categories that serve almost as much as an index as a table of contents. With thirteen categories in all, information covered includes Approaches to Instruction, Methods and Procedures Employed in Instruction, Qualities Necessary for Fencing and their Development, The Evolving of Technique and its Instruction, The Keeping of Distance, Hand Techniques, "Master-Pupil" instruction, and Individual Lessons.

Techniques and exercises

Below each of these category headings, specific techniques and exercises for that topic are listed. The Table of Contents is thus very helpful because it is a finger-tip reference guide to specifics, steering the reader to certain page numbers for specific techniques thus making location and relocation of information easy.

¹ The original title was A vivás és oktatása. The text was translated from Hungarian into English by Gyula Gulyás and revised by John Harvie and Stephen E. Vamos.

Edited by fencers

Although translated from Hungarian, the text reads quite well. Perhaps this is because it was edited by fencers rather than linguists, or perhaps it is because the text itself was so well written. In either case, the language of the book is easy to follow and the author's meaning is seldom muddled by too few or too many words.

The reader, however, should have a good working knowledge of competitive fencing and fencing terms. As the text is written for the competitive fencing master, it assumes a strong knowledge in the art and practice of competitive swordplay: foil, epee and sabre. Thus, there is little or no explanation of common fencing terms. Maestro Szabo does, however, take time to explain and define any new terms used in the manuscript. Each section offers a few "teaching" terms which give the reader an extended vocabulary in the instruction of fencing.

The individuality of the student

Although each section deals with a specific aspect, technique or difficulty in the development of a fencer, Maestro Szabo never seems to lose sight of the individuality of the student. He constantly reminds the reader not to force the student into the rigid confines or the mold of a fencer, but to take into account each student's physical attributes and limitations and teach them accordingly. He tells the reader to teach with patience and responsibility, not only the talented, but the less skillful as well.

The problems of group instruction

The text deals first and foremost with the problems of group instruction. Maestro Szabo offers the reader a number of exercises and problem solving techniques that will not only correct faults during instruction, but, as an individual activity, could help correct the student's faults in later practice. He offers examples of instruction by demonstration and explanation in order to obtain certain objectives while giving the appropriate assistance to the student. These techniques are quite simple to put into practice, logical and practical both for fencing instructors and teachers of stage combat.

Illustrations of the techniques

This comprehensive text is further supported by a variety of distinct illustrations. The line drawings do a wonderful job detailing

the information and techniques presented in the text. In all 120 illustrations care is taken to insure proper placement of the body, from the attitude of the head to the angle of the torso and placement of the legs and feet.

Illustrations depict different angles and stages of the same technique for reader clarity. Some illustrations depict techniques in a frame by frame format. These steps are taken in order to avoid errors in interpretation. Maestro Szabo does a wonderful job of illustrating a text on movement in a static, two-dimensional medium.

“For a text written for the competitive fencing instructor, Fencing and the Master also proves a grand tool for the teacher of stage combat.”

A grand tool for stage combat

For a text written for the competitive fencing instructor, *Fencing and the Master* also proves a grand tool for the teacher of stage combat. Many techniques taught in this text I learned when fencing in college and have since applied to stage combat with favorable results. These techniques, along with so many others for organizing a class and helping effectively train and educate students are readily available in this text. With only the simplest alterations many of these techniques can be effectively applied to theatrical fencing.

There is no such book on our craft, and this one is so closely allied with the goals of the stage combatant that it is presently the best source on fundamental teaching techniques in our field. There are problems with treating competitive fencing as stage combat but the goal of Maestro Szabo's text, to supply direct educational assistance to instructors on how to provide students with a solid foundation of skills, is the same goal as that of the instructor of stage combat. This text provides that information and meets that goal.

A COMPLETE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FENCING & DUELLING by Carl A. Thimm

London, 1896. 6 pages of Preface (vii-xii); 388 pages of bibliography; 93 itemized pages of bibliographical index; 99 pages of "Notes on Duelling, Fencing, and the Sword, culled from the Press during the past few Years"; and 4 pages of index for "Notes." 34 illustrations (reproductions of plates and engravings); hard cover.

— [reprinted, Bronx, New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968. (Ayer Co. Publishers, Inc. ISBN 0-405-09028-5) \$30.00]*

— [reprinted, James Cummins; Bookseller, 1992. ISBN 1-882860-02-0 \$75.00]*

* prices via Books in Print 1993-94. New Jersey: R.R. Bower, 1992. (Vol. IV).

¹ Egerton Castle's *Schools and Masters of Fence*, reviewed "The Pen and The Sword" *The Fight Master*, Fall 1990, Vol. XIII #3, p. 40-41
Capt. Alfred Hutton's *Old Sword-Play*, reviewed "The Pen and The Sword" *The Fight Master*, Spring 1993, Vol. XVI #1, p. 41-42
The Sword and the Centuries, reviewed "The Pen and The Sword" *The Fight Master*, Spring 1992, Vol. XIV #1, p. 45.

MR. CARL A. THIMM IS ONE OF THE NINETEENTH century's leading authorities on the history of fencing. A contemporary and colleague of Captain Alfred Hutton and Mr. Egerton Castle, he was an avid fencer and scholar. He wrote several texts and magazine articles concerning the history and practice of fencing and dueling.¹

In 1889, Mr. Thimm, along with Mr. Castle, published the preliminary of this work as an appendix to *Fencing, Boxing and Wrestling*, a volume of the *Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes*.² This appendix became the foundation for the bibliography in Mr. Castle's *Schools and Masters of Fence*. As Mr. Castle moved forward in his reading and research to develop his text, Mr. Thimm did likewise.

Expanding to full bibliography

In 1891 he expanded the appendix into a full bibliographical work on the art of fencing. *A Complete Bibliography of the Art of Fence*, was published in English and translated into both French and German. This text met with such widespread enthusiasm that many readers provided Mr. Thimm with due praise, offering corrections and additions. This information, along with further research, was applied to the text, leading to the publication of *A Complete Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling*, in 1896.

Mr. Thimm's *A Complete Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling* was "intended as a work of reference for all interested in fencing and duelling," and it certainly hits its mark. [preface p. x] In the roughly 100 years since the bibliography was compiled, there has been no publication so organized and complete concerning the subject of fencing and dueling. The bibliography is an impressive collection of names, dates, and authors of primary sources on the subject of sword play and the development of the science of fence.

Defining "the subject of Fence"

To Thimm, the science of fence, and this bibliography, is not just limited to swordplay. He believes that "the subject of Fence embraces all works relating to the art of offence and defence with all weapons held in the hands, for the science of arms should include the use of all non-ballistic weapons, from foil to bayonet, and from dagger to battleaxe." [preface p. x] This bibliography does just that.

Thimm's work is not, however, just a list of early texts and manuscripts — it is a critical bibliography of all known articles, treatises, and texts, published or in manuscript, in all European languages and countries. The texts are listed alphabetically by author (or title when no author is credited) and further supported by

a thorough, comprehensive index. The index is divided by subject (including: Armes et Armures, Back Sword, Bayonet, Broadsword, Buckler, Cutlass, Dagger, Duelling, Falchon, Lance, Pike, Pistol, Quarter-Staff, Rapier, Sabre, Single-Stick and Small Sword) and arranged by language and listed in chronological order. This is of interest for those concerned with reference and research under specific topics, countries or periods.

Previous to Thimm, bibliographies concerning fence and dueling seem to have been incomplete, specific to the nationality of the author, or were based on information gathered from secondary sources. This made the dates, titles, and/or locations of the listed manuscripts faulty or incorrect. A great deal of information provided in these earlier bibliographies was not cross-referenced or confirmed, thus bibliographical information could not be trusted. Thimm, on the other hand, corrected and verified his information with the originals and, whenever possible, listed where the old and rare volumes are to be found.

Personal comments and reviews

Along with the standard information of author, title, publisher and date, Thimm provides his reader with personal comments and reviews for some of the texts. Many of these are brief notes, just a sentence in length, while others are quotes from the likes of Egerton Castle. These commentaries are mostly listed with the more common treatises, but they provide the reader with a fundamental understanding of the role the author played in the evolution of the science or the general topic of the text.

A reference tool for student and master

The bibliography is by no means meant for casual reading. It is a reference tool for the student and master interested in locating historical manuscripts. But, there is more to Thimm's work than lists of out of print texts. Included with his extensive bibliography and index is a collection of newspaper and magazine articles concerning fencing and dueling.

"In strict justice of the subject," says Thimm in his Preface, "a bibliographer is bound to chronicle all 'poems, pamphlets, or sermons,' and other such works, be they written for or against duelling," and he has done just that. [Preface p. xi] He included all accounts of duels and dueling which appeared in *The Times* from 1831-1895, along with many articles from a variety of other publications. Unlike the bibliographical portion of the text, one can sit down and read these articles. Many are fascinating, and provide a quick overview of the different philosophies towards fencing and dueling.

Articles relating to theatrical swordplay

For the stage combatant, it is interesting to note that along with these articles on dueling, there are several articles relating to theatrical swordplay.³ All of these clippings are carefully noted, and listed in chronological order with the name of the publications listed at the top of the article. Each clipping is noted in a separate index, listed by title in the order they appear in the text. This, like the index of the bibliography, is helpful to the reader and researcher, although sometimes titles of the articles are misleading.

Within the 538 pages of Thimm's tome, are 34 illustrations, a collection of portraits of certain leading masters from various centuries with select diagrams from several treatises. As a text concerning written records of fencing and dueling, there are more pictures of authors than illustrations from their manuscripts. I found it of interest to see what Capo Ferro, Di Grassi and Fabris as well as Castle, Capt. Hutton and even Mr. Thimm actually looked like.

“If you are looking for a reliable and extensively researched reference guide ... there is nothing else available that even comes close...”

A Complete Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling is an excellent reference tool for the historical student and for the theatrical combatant interested in researching a particular master, period or weapon style. There is no other reference source available that accurately lists all known material concerning fencing and dueling, in and out of print, from the late fifteenth century up through the end of the nineteenth century.

Getting your personal copy

Presently, there are two copies of this text available in print. Both copies are complete, unabridged facsimiles of Thimm's original 1896 text. Both are hard bound with clear, legible print and as far as I can tell, there is no difference in the publications other than price. The 1968 editions are probably warehouse remainders — but they're \$45.00 less than the 1992 edition. If you are interested in owning a copy, I recommend buying the '68 edition soon, as there probably aren't many copies left. If you are looking for a reliable and extensively researched reference guide to period manuscripts on fencing and dueling, there is nothing else available that even comes close to Thimm's bibliography.

■ ■ ■

² Badminton Library, *Fencing, Boxing, Wrestling* 3rd Ed. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893.

³ Article relating to theatrical swordplay. A Fatal Stage Duel — 463; Combats on Stage — 464. The Combats in *Romeo and Juliet* — 534.

Put to the Test

RESULTS OF THE SAFD'S PROFICIENCY SKILLS TEST THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

JANUARY, 1995

Louisville, KY
Date: January 19, 1995
Instructor: K. Jenny Jones
Adjudicator: Drew Fracher

Drew Dicostanzo Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS
Christopher Boehlman Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

JULY

Tecumseh! (Ohio)
Date: July 27, 1995
Instructor: Brent Gibbs
Adjudicator: David Woolley

Tony London Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS
recommended

Carol Van Baale Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS
recommended

Mark Maier Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS
recommended

Claire Engel Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Damian Ernest Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Don Gruel Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Demetrius Thomas Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Michael Lembke Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Tim Angevine Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Randolph Messersmith R & D, UA, QS

Raymond Speakman R & D, UA, QS

Camela Kraemer R & D, UA, QS

Michael Mayhall R & D, UA, QS

Aaron Moreland R & D, UA, QS

Brian S. Norman R & D, UA, QS

Brian Fardo R & D, UA, QS

Lori J. Hunt R & D, UA, QS

Video

Date: August 16, 1995
Instructor: Gregory Hoffman
Adjudicator: Erik Fredricksen

Aaron Anderson Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS
Tony Pescalli Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Video

Date: August 16, 1995
Instructor: Charles Conwell
Adjudicator: J. Allen Suddeth

Suzanne Case (Recert.) Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS
Christine Cowin (Recert.) Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Ft. Harrod Productions

Date: August 20, 1995
Instructor: Paul Dennhardt
Adjudicator: Drew Fracher

Jenny Johnson Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Sam Reading Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

David Frydrychowski Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Hector Fernandez Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Jacob Thomas Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Aaron Glickman Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Anthony Soucek Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

James Freund Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Gregg Lloyd Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Chris Rose Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Marc Liby Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Jean Kerr Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Otis Cook Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

David Hopkins Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Jessie Robins Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Robert Durham Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, BS

Video

Date: August 22, 1995
Instructor: Colleen Kelly
Adjudicator: Drew Fracher

Susan McCain (recert.) Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed

Utah Shakespeare Festival

Date: August 27, 1995
Instructor: Chris Villa
Adjudicator: Drew Fracher

Amy Clites Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, S & S

Ian Bedford Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, S & S

Shad Ramsey Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, S & S

Video

Date: August 29, 1995
Instructor: Colleen Kelly
Adjudicator: Drew Fracher

Lou Bird (Recert & adding) R & D, Unarmed, BS, QS

Monica Russell (adding) R & D, Unarmed, BS, QS

OCTOBER

New York City

Date: October 9, 1995
Instructor: Jamie Cheatham, Tim Brown, Gregg Rochman
Adjudicator: David Leong

John Stockinger Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Jason Baad Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Jenny-Wren Sanders Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Michelle Heisler Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

James Cairl Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

Manolo Martinez Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, QS

NOVEMBER

Penn State University

Date: November 8, 1995
Instructor: Jane Ridley
Adjudicator: J. Allen Suddeth

Mike Polak Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Brooke Behmke Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Jesica Raab Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Kellyn Wolke Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Virginia Queen Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Andrew Heffernan Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Tyler Hayes Stilwell Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Keegan-Michael Key Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

DECEMBER

Northwestern University

Date: December 3, 1995
Instructor: Chuck Coyle
Adjudicator: Richard Raether

Brenda E. Kelley Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

David Schmidt Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Meredith Patt Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Julie Lockhart Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Andrea Blumberg Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Christian Carranza Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Nolan Haims Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

University of Iowa

Date: December 15, 1995
Instructor: Brian Byrnes
Adjudicator: David Woolley

Christina Marty Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Kimberly Versteeg Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Estlin Feigley Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Stephen Thorne Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS
recommended

Dato Bakhtadze Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

John Pszyk Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Angela Brazil Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Christi Kathol Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Philip Lynch Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS
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Lad Brown Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Sean Williams Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Michael Grecco Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

R. Sky Palkowitz Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Cinnamon Schultz Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS
recommended

Jack Lynch Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

The Rough House (Chicago)

Date: December 18, 1995
Instructor: Stephen Gray
Adjudicator: David Woolley

Isabel Liss Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

Martin Kappel Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed

Richard Gilbert Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

William Tellmann Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

JANUARY, 1996

En Garde (Minneapolis)

Date: January 8, 1996
Instructor: Michael Anderson
Adjudicator: David Woolley

James Green Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS
Sarah Losey Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS
Donald Preston Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS
Tasha Hardy Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS
Greg Marchond Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS
Dawn Reed Rapier & Dagger, UA, BS

Video

Date: January 28, 1996
Instructor: Gregory Hoffman
Adjudicator: Erik Fredricksen

Amy Andersen R & D, Unarmed, BS, QS
recommended

Ted Sharon R & D, Unarmed, BS, QS
recommended

Markus Langhans (add) Broadsword

Joe Price (recert.) Rapier/ Dagger, Unarmed

Kimberly Lenz (recert.) Rapier/ Dagger, Unarmed

Emilt Taggart (recert.) Rapier/ Dagger, Unarmed

JUNE

Video

Date: June 1, 1996
Instructor: David "Pops" Doersch
Adjudicator: Richard Raether

Bruce Lecure (recert.) Rapier/ Dagger, Unarmed

Matt Richardson (recert.) Rapier/ Dagger, Unarmed

University of Iowa

Date: June 23, 1996
Instructor: Brian Byrnes
Adjudicator: Richard Raether

Wesley J. Bmullik Rapier & Dagger, UA, QS

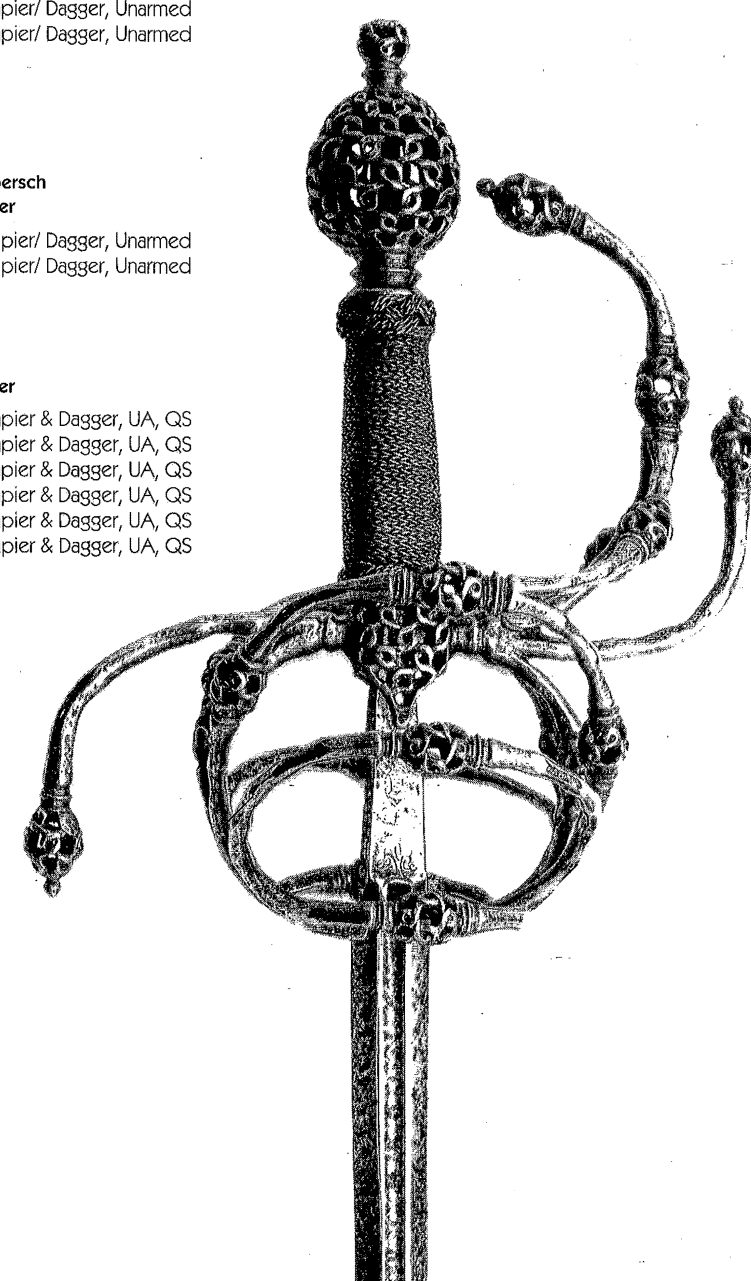
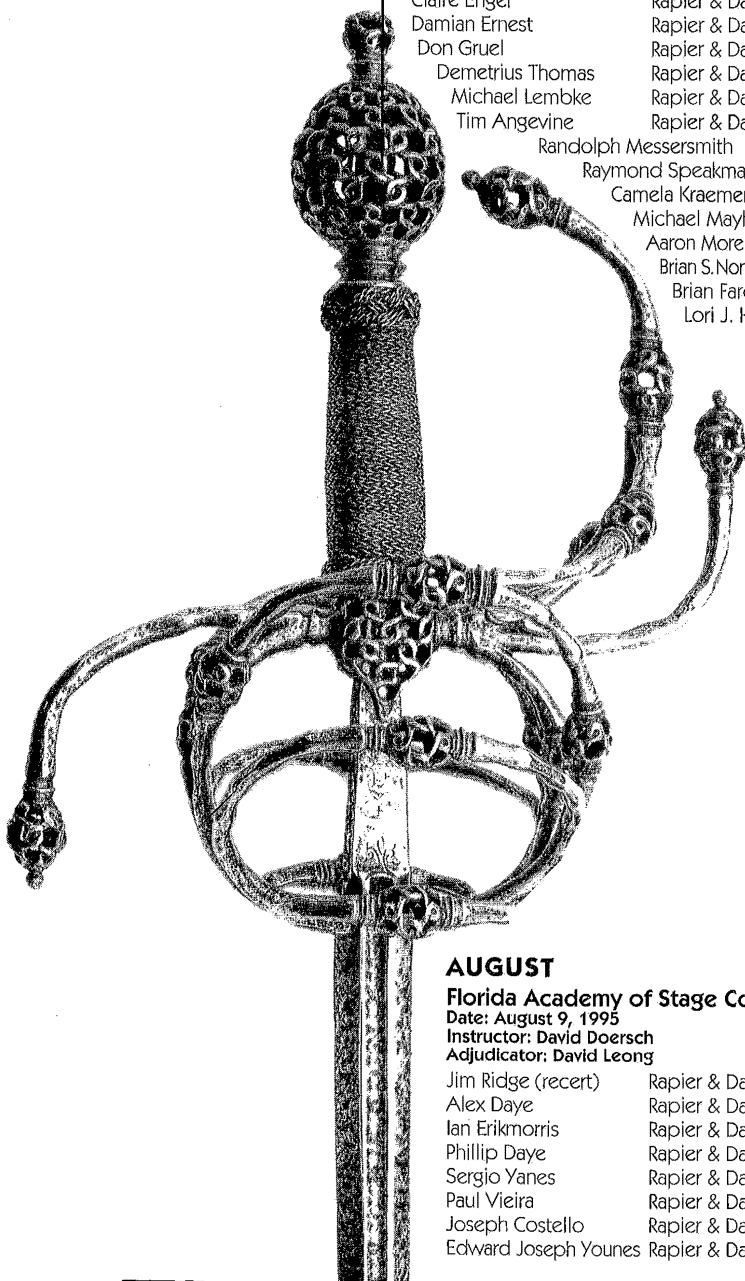
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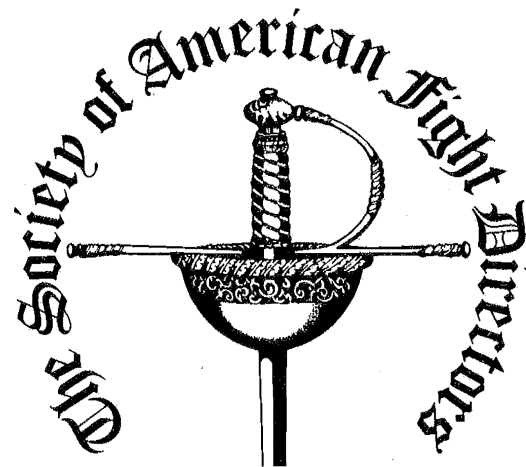
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Society of American Fight Directors

DEDICATED TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND SAFETY OF STAGE COMBAT



The Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) is a non-profit organization devoted to training, and improving the quality of stage combat. We are committed to the highest standards of safety in the theatrical, film and television industries. The SAFD offers educational opportunities across the country at universities, privately, and at the annual National Stage Combat Workshop expressly to disseminate this information. In addition, the SAFD tests individuals in three categories:

Actor/Combatant ♦ Teacher ♦ Fight Master

However, one need not take any sort of test in order to be a member of SAFD. Anyone interested in the art of fight choreography and stage fighting can join as a Friend. Members of SAFD receive: a 10% discount on all SAFD workshops; *The Fight Master*, a journal which is published twice yearly and contains in-depth articles on the history and practice of stage combat, the latest equipment, staging practices; and *The Cutting Edge*, a newsletter updating SAFD activities, policies and member news.

To apply for membership in the SAFD fill out the form below and send to:

Mark Olsen, SAFD Secretary
University of Houston, Dept. of Theatre, Houston, TX 77204-5071

Dues are \$35.00 annually. (For members outside the U.S., annual dues are \$40.00)
You must enclose a \$35.00 check covering dues for the current year.

Checks should be made payable to Society of American Fight Directors.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FIGHT DIRECTORS

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Name _____

If you've passed the SAFD Proficiency Skills Test, please fill out:

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SAFD

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