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The Society of American Fight Directors

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The FightMaster

Fall 2014 The Journal of the Society of American Fight Directors



**THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS
of Teaching Stage
Combat**

**THE FIRST
FIGHT TEST**

**COMBAT IN
CURRICULUM**
Integrating fight
choreography
into the collegiate
classroom

**The Three
Things You
Need To
“ACT THE FIGHT”**

**SWORD-WIELDING
WOMEN in the
Propaganda
Images of
World War I**

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Is there a set of universal rules for teaching effective stage combat? **Joseph Travers** thinks so, and sets out to put them down in writing.

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Happy 35th birthday, SPT! **J. Allen Suddeth** describes the original testing environment and reconnects with the first actors to take the Skills Proficiency Test. **Joseph Travers** offers reflection on how far the SPT has come since its creation, as well as the 35th anniversary celebration.

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How can educators make standard curriculum more exciting? By incorporating stage combat, of course! In this article, **Kate Busselle** recounts a classroom experience in which stage combat lured her students into the world of script analysis.

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Editorially Speaking



“Playing the role of Editor in tonight’s performance...Jean A. Monfort”

I was honored to be offered the Editorship for *The Fight Master*. Being relatively new to the fight community in general, I had only known the magazine under Michael’s exemplary work. To be handed the banner made me at once proud and nervous. The nerves stemmed primarily from knowing that at the time of my acceptance I had just accepted job building a college-level Business English program in central China. As those of you who contacted me throughout that time know, China was an incredible experience with a very real, very limiting firewall on its Internet. Getting even the most basic of things done proved to be

a days-long challenge. Many thanks for the patience and understanding throughout those stressful weeks.

One of the underlying themes for this issue is fundamentals. How do we use stage combat to engage students, and how do we get students to engage in stage combat? What techniques are necessary to make safe, effective performers? The theme stemmed from my own current teaching experience. I realized in my first week teaching that 95% of what I had brought with me was not suitable for my classroom. I had to strip the course down to its fundamental, skeletal structure, and build from there. I think a similar process happens when approaching combat in the classroom, or creating fight choreography. A teacher must be able to follow a curriculum while at the same time adapting to the needs of the students. There are many ways this can be done, and the articles within the following pages wrestle with such issues.

Continuing with this theme, the Skills Proficiency Test turned 35 this past summer. The SAFD has evolved since those early days of teaching to incorporate classrooms all over the country and bring ever more students into the world of stage combat. Recent alterations to our certification language, and the debate over our definitions and standards for levels of proficiency both speak to a healthy inspection of our own basic tenants. Our growth points to a strong relationship between teacher and student, choreographer and actor, which is why the SAFD continues to make strides in establishing itself as a respected and necessary body in the theater community.

I look forward to developing further issues of *The Fight Master*. It is my hope to build upon the magazine’s look and content, to continue the growth and polish of my predecessor, and to bring articles that get you thinking, smiling, and engaging with our community.

Be well, fight well!

Best wishes,

Jean A. Monfort, Editor
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Editorial and graphic content featured in *The Fight Master* is the product of contributions from SAFD members of all levels as well as from the global stage combat community. Participation is greatly encouraged and submissions are accepted on a rolling basis, with deadlines for the Fall and Spring editions occurring on June 1 and December 1 respectively. For submissions by traditional mail, please send a shipping address request by email.

Articles

Submitted material will be edited for clarity and length with the assistance and approval of the author. Articles should include a short biography 150 words or less, as well as contact information. By submitting material to *The Fight Master*, it is assumed the author agrees the following:

- All submissions are subject to editorial discretion
- All work submitted is assumed to be the original work of the author, and *The Fight Master* will not assume any of the author's copyright liabilities and publication rights.
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- Before publication, author must approve all changes beyond grammar and conventions
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- No submissions defaming individuals by name will be published
- Authors are assumed to be working toward the betterment of the SAFD and, thus, will not be paid for submissions

Please forward submissions and questions to:

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Graphics

Both digital and traditional photographs are accepted; however, resolution will play a factor in where, or if an image is used. All photos should be accompanied by the names of the performers w/ roles (if fewer than five are pictured), photographer, play, playwright, fight director, theatre company, and year of performance. Without this information, we can not give proper credit to the contributors and the picture will not be used.

Traditional images/negatives submitted by mail should be sent in an envelope clearly labeled "Photos—Do Not Bend," with larger photos secured between cardboard or foam core. Submissions should also include a return self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Digital images must be submitted in an uncompressed format (RAW, TIFF, PNG or TGA) on a CD or DVD if possible. Images that have been reduced in size to send by email will also be considered as long as a larger version exists that can be requested later. Please do NOT crop or alter photos. Touch-ups and color correction will be performed as needed.

Please forward submissions and questions to:

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Kate Busselle is a MA Theatre Studies student at the University of Central Florida. She is an Actor Combatant with the SAFD. She works as an actor, director, fight choreographer, educator, and makeup artist. Her thesis explores female-enacted violence in female minority American playwrights.



Benjamin Curns, AC has been an Artistic Associate with American Shakespeare Center (Staunton, VA) since 2001. He has served as a teacher & tour manager, a Young Company director (*Winter's Tale*, *2 Henry IV*), a member of the resident acting company (title roles in *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Henry VIII*), and as fight director (*Cymbeline*, *Othello*, *1 Henry IV*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo & Juliet*). This summer, he will direct the touring production of *Much Ado About Nothing* and will head to UNC Chapel Hill this fall to pursue his MFA.



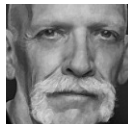
Steven Schwall has been a practicing Historic European martial artist since 1974, participating in fully armored tournaments with companies like the Company of St. George. In 2006, he was asked to lend his expertise to a production of *Camelot*, and his journey into stage combat began. He joined the SAFD in November of that year, and has been seen as a regular student and teacher at the Winter Wonderland Workshop, the Eureka Stage Combat Workshop, Carnage in the Corn, and the Lincoln Assassination.



Jim Stark, a Certified Teacher, is Chair of Theatre at Hanover College, where he teaches acting and stage combat. He has also taught for the Winter Wonderland Workshop, the Young Actors Institute and the Summer Intensive at NCSA



Zev Steinberg is an MFA Acting Candidate at Michigan State University, is an Advanced Actor Combatant, and serves on the Governing Body of the SAFD as the Friend / Actor Combatant / Advanced Actor Combatant Representative. Zev has choreographed professionally all over the Chicago area, has taught workshops all over the country, and serves as the assistant Coordinator of the National Stage Combat Workshop. In 2011 Zev was honored by the SAFD College of Fight Masters by being named the recipient of the Paddy Crean Award.



J. Allen Suddeth is a Broadway veteran of eleven shows including Disney's *Newsies*, over 150 Off-Broadway shows, and hundreds of Regional Theater productions. He has staged action for over 750 television shows, and has taught at Juilliard, Rutgers, SUNY Purchase, and Strasberg.



Joseph Travers (SAFD Fight Director/Certified Teacher) has been fight directing and teaching stage combat for over twenty-five years. His work has been seen on Broadway, Off-Broadway, regionally and in national tours. He teaches stage combat to MFA actors at Columbia University, and heads the stage combat program at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy, NYC. Since 1995 he has been the Managing Director of Swordplay, NYC's longest running stage combat school.



Heidi Wolf has a BA in Medieval and Renaissance History and is a Certified Teacher with the SAFD. She is currently researching American women, with an emphasis on women of color, who served in France during WWI.

On The Cover



Pictured: Eric Kuhn (left) and John Tourtellotte (right)
Photographer: Ben Rezendes

Fight Matters

The Ten Commandments of Teaching



BY JOSEPH TRAVERS, CT/FD

Since first attending the National Fight Directing Workshop (affectionately known as “the Barn”) in 1996, I have often used as a touchstone in my work as a fight director the so-called “Ten Commandments of Fight Directing” formulated for the Barn by Fight Masters J. Allen Suddeth and David Leong. More than once, remembering and holding on to one of these commandments has gotten me through a challenging moment.

I wanted to see if I could create a similar set of “touchstones” for the teaching of stage combat. Below is my version of “The Ten Commandments of Teaching Stage Combat” (with brief explanations). Narrowing things down to a list of ten was not easy, but it was a very good exercise in choosing what I felt was most important.

The commandments below are based on my thoughts and ruminations after twenty-five years teaching stage combat. If, after reading them, you have the impulse to make a list of your own, or think I’ve missed something important, please, share! We can all benefit from having as many touchstones as possible.

The Ten Commandments of Teaching Stage Combat

1

Be safe

Obvious? Perhaps. Of course, this means not only teaching safe technique safely, but keeping the students (and teacher, and assistant) safe while doing so. Think things through! Providing sufficient space, examining (and cleaning) the floor, maintaining weapons, having a well-stocked first aid kit and keeping up first aid and CPR training are just a few examples of planning for safety. Also, make the effort to walk through what you’ll teach with the assistant (and highlight possible safety concerns) before class begins.

2

Be prepared

From knowing every detail of the subject, to arranging the room (and the people in it), all real preparation serves to maximize learning. Teachers of other disciplines and subjects create lesson plans for each class in order to think through every aspect of the lesson beforehand. Stage combat should be no exception! No matter how many times you’ve taught basic unarmed, you haven’t taught this particular lesson to these particular students before. You should prepare accordingly – for yourself and them!

3

Be clear and consistent

Speak the concept, principle or procedure clearly and simply, connecting it to the larger subject. Demonstrate each technique just as clearly. Every time.

4

Be attentive

How’s the space? The weapons? The energy? The air? The light? The temperature? The time? The focus? The partnering? Can you be seen by everyone? Heard? Can you see everyone? Are they with you? Do they need a break?

ndments Stage Combat



5 Be both rigorous and encouraging
Students need to be held to an exacting standard, having their technique rigorously critiqued and reinforced, *and at the same time* they need to feel that you're there at every step to help them meet the standard.

6 Teach the whole student—body, mind and heart
The whole actor will be involved in the moment of violence on stage, if the moment is truthful. Start getting students used to using all of themselves! Not just "What's the movement?" but, "What's the strategy?" "The martial principle?" "The desire or intention?" Drill them, question them, and inspire them.

7 Remember, this is a Theatre Arts class
However fascinating the subjects may be to us, stage combat isn't self-defense and it isn't martial arts. It's way cooler. Keep bringing it back to the storytelling! Remember, when they leave you, they will need to *act* these techniques!

8 Befriend Time
It's either with you, or against you – make it with you! If you respect Time, beginning and ending class promptly (and not wasting Time in between), Time will be on your side. During class, learn when to tighten and when to slacken the reins, and you and Time will become friends!

9 Be a student
Always! There is no surer way to draw in and inspire students than to have questions of your own you're striving to answer, lessons of your own you're struggling to learn, principles you're trying to redefine, techniques you're working to master.

10 Remember your teachers
Someone inspired you to choose this work. You could do worse than to emulate them. Work as hard as they did to pass on this tradition, and the Art will survive and thrive. ✦

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The First FIGHT TEST

By J. Allen Suddeth

I have told a shorthand version of the first Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) fight test and my involvement many times, to many people and in many situations, but always briefly and from my own perspective. It is time, therefore, that this piece of history be written down in as much detail as I can remember, before the memories disappear like a fuzzy VHS tape. To help me set the record straight, I have sought out as many of the “players” from that day as I could, to add their perspectives to mine. So here, to the best of my knowledge, are the events and details surrounding the “The First Fight Test.”

Somewhere around 1978, I wrote a letter to then SAFD President, David Boushey, asking why the Society of American Fight Directors wasn’t testing and certifying students in the art of stage combat. The Society of British Fight Directors (SBFD) had been testing American university and private students in New York, Dallas and perhaps elsewhere for years prior to my letter. Money was changing hands and students were being given certificates labeled “SBFD.” I myself was even caught up in the frenzy, testing before Paddy Crean at the Juilliard School. Erik Fredricksen also hired Paddy (who was SBFD) to test his students at Carnegie Mellon University. My issue was not the training, but rather that it had become a SBFD monopoly. Unbeknownst to me, correspondence between the SAFD and the SBFD had already been taking place, resulting in the SBFD’s agreement to relinquish testing in the US to the SAFD. My timing just happened to be fortuitous when I proposed holding a test in New York City to David Boushey.

After a great deal more correspondence, including further proposals for “required techniques” for each weapon, Mr. Boushey approved of my request and I held the first SAFD “fight test” July 14, 1979. Erik Fredricksen was the judge (the term “adjudicator” came about years later) at the old “Showcase Studios,” in a building on 8th Avenue around 55th Street, that has since been torn down.

I trained my students for many weeks in private classes, knowing that they would be guinea pigs for a new horizon; however, I never thought that the “fight test,” would be embraced by so many universities, colleges, private teachers and the National Stage Combat Workshop, becoming a benchmark for stage combat training in the United States. Nor did I foresee the test embracing eight weapon styles. What started out as 12 students has grown over the years to encompass the training and testing of tens of thousands of actors, and scores of Certified Teachers.

The impact of the first test and what would eventually come out of it is very special to me, but also for those who took part. I recently asked some of those first students to recount their experiences for the benefit of all who have tested as well as all those who have yet to go through this testing process.

In the early days of the SAFD, we thought it would be a good idea to number each certificate. The numbers with each name are there for that reason and the list includes all of the first participants. Where possible, I have also included information I know of these individuals and some of the great things they have gone on to accomplish.

No. 1 Anne Giroux: was the first ever certificate holder! She was a solid student and performer, but alas, I have lost track of her.

No. 2 Deborah Houston: garnered No. 2, was fierce and she tested well, but alas, I have also lost track of her.

No. 3 Randy Kovitz: (Recommended) was a Carnegie Mellon University and B.H. Barry student first, who moved to LA and had some success. He partnered with Tawnya Pettiford and was the first male student to be “Recommended” in the SAFD.

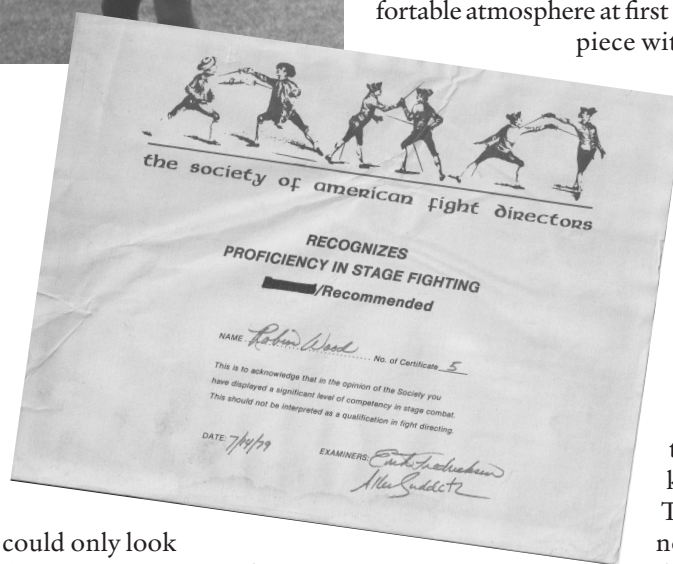
No. 4 Jim Manley: went on to train for years after this first test, becoming a solid member of Fights R Us. He has done many live and TV fights and has remained in touch ever since.

Jim’s Reflection: We felt like pioneers at the beginning of what might become a ‘big thing’ in the, yet to exist legitimately, world of USA Stage Combat. There wasn’t a feeling of competition, rather



Above: Kent Shelton (left) and Robin Wood, circa 1979, on the grounds of the New York Renaissance Fair.

Right: SAFD Certificate #5, awarded to Robin Wood July 14, 1979. It is believed to be the only surviving copy of the original 12 certificates awarded with the first SAFD fight test.



of camaraderie, surrounded by friends, fight-buddies; each encouraging the other. I knew I could only look good and show my best ‘stuff’ if my partner was on the same page. They may have been physically very different from me, or have more or less training, but we had to work as one, fill the gaps, anticipate problem(s), or whatever [was] necessary in this partner dance (fight).

I gathered great confidence from J. Allen Suddeth because [he] knew what I could do better than I knew myself. That helped me, but it also put me on the spot and I remember everything that I could have done better. It’s hard to remember the moves that were successful (that’s just a good feeling), but easy to remember where I screwed up. That was [the] great thing about testing; it made me a better fighter. I passed the first test, but it wasn’t until the second test that I was ‘Recommended.’ I learned from that first SAFD test how to really put it on the line. What a privilege to be part of a great history.

No. 5 Robin Wood: was a solid performer, graduate of North Carolina School of the Arts and demonstrated great strength, wit and flair. He was a founding member of The Hanlon-Lees Action Theater.

Robin’s Reflection: I was delighted when Allen Suddeth called to let me know that the newly formed Society of American Fight Directors was holding its first qualification exam in the summer of 1979. I knew Allen well from having performed with him in the showcase of ‘A Night at the Fights’ in New York that spring. A number of us in that performance had become fast friends with a mutual love for all things theater, but particularly stage fighting. Allen told me that the first fight test was going to be a limited group composed mostly of his students. I was very eager to do it, but (in my ignorance) not tremendously worried about the result.

I had trained in gymnastics and stage fighting under Bob Murray (a Paddy Crean disciple) at the North Carolina School of the Arts,

as well as working under J.D. Martinez at the Virginia Museum Theater. I was also cocky, brash, arrogant and headstrong. Despite all this, Allen kindly extended me the opportunity. My fight partner at the qualification was Kent Shelton, a childhood friend and classmate at NCSA, who worked with me as joint fight choreographer of the New York Renaissance Festival that summer. In addition to our choreography duties at the New York Renaissance Festival, we also performed a rapier and dagger fight for the crowds that was full of witty banter (so we thought), flips, tumbles and sword work. It was that fight that we performed at the test.

One hot day in July, we left Tuxedo and took the train into midtown where the test was being held. Erik Fredrickson, who we also knew from ‘A Night at the Fights’ was the judge. It was a very comfortable atmosphere at first and we performed our choreographed piece without a hitch. I thought the test was

over and we could go on our way.

However, Allen then announced that we had to perform a new fight that Erik would choreograph on the spot. That was when I started getting nervous because Allen had this look in his eye that I knew quite well; a ‘wait until you see this’ look that meant trouble.

We paired off with different partners; however, because there were an odd number of people, Allen volunteered to partner with me.² I didn’t know whether to thank him or run. The rest of the test is a blur to me now, but I remember being really put through the paces as Erik created the most difficult sword routine I had ever seen, with moves that I still can’t pronounce. As we suffered through, Allen maintained that maniacal smile throughout. Finally, Allen gave me a wink and said, ‘Well, it’s not perfect, but I think you’ve got it.’ With that, I was a member of the Society of American Fight Directors (Certificate No. 5) and damned proud of it.

No. 6 Elisha Ignatoff: was a very talented character actor. Elisha has gone on to become a successful member of IATSE, and still works out of the New York area.

Elisha’s Reflection: I had always wanted to be a classical actor, which inevitably involves familiarity with stage combat; and had been training in various techniques during and after college. I was very excited to become involved with the effort to construct a standardized vocabulary for staged combat and the establishment of a uniform training and certification program.

No. 7 Mimi Bessette: was a solid student as I recall, but I have lost track of her.

No. 8 Tawnya Pettiford: (Recommended) was rock solid as I remember. She was the first female, indeed the first African-American female to “Recommend” with the SAFD. She went on to voice the game *Halo 1*, as “Foehammer,” act on TV in *The Fugitive*, *Crazy In Love* and *Twin Peaks*. She also earned her PhD. and is now a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA.

Tawnya’s Reflection: My days of learning the art of fighting, both armed and unarmed combat, were some of the best days I spent on my journey through the Carnegie-Mellon School of Drama (CMU). It was intense training and in those days, and I was in the best shape of my life. Fighting provided for me, a wonderful release of mind, body and soul. It was a great vehicle

to unleash my aggressions in a safe and organic way while at the same time being highly choreographed and technically precise. I really did love it!

I recall the entire process being quite an honor . . . I suppose it was because my first certification tests for the Society of British Fight Directors were so trying and tense. I had a partner that was wild and unsafe. I felt anxious and had difficulty with him and his approach to the work in both rehearsal and performance. Given the opportunity to test for the Society of American Fight Directors, I changed partners. It was a decision I made only two weeks [before] the testing date. If I had not changed partners, I would not have wanted to go through with the test at all.

Randy Kovitz, a classmate and friend at CMU, was willing to step up and be my partner with such short notice. He was a fabulous partner. To this day he was the most incredible fight/scene partner I have ever had. Randy was also an excellent fight, movement and mime artist. We were fearless together. I was also a gymnast and we added flips and tumbling to our fight scene that made it a pretty spectacular sight. I felt so safe and supported by Randy as we parried, lunged, slapped, punched, tumbled and flipped our way through the classic Kate & Petrucchio scene. We called it “aggrobatics,” a combination of acrobatics and aggravated behavior. *The Taming of the Shrew* scene provided plenty of that. Flying through the air was exhilarating and, upstairs in that 8th Avenue studio in NYC, we both passed with recommendation on the wings of our exuberance, attention to detail and skill set.

I loved fighting. It was a full body experience. I was thoroughly released in the thrill of swordplay, cloak and dagger and all the rest. ‘Girls’ don’t usually get to fight on stage and come to the rescue or ‘kick ass.’ What a breakthrough, instead of being rescued as the ‘helpless female,’ which is demonstrated throughout the cannon of dramatic literature, you get to rescue yourself because with a sword you are FIERCE. It was [also] my birthday that day. All in all it was one of the best birthdays ever!

No. 9 Peter James Cumba: came a long way in his training, and though he struggled with techniques, eventually persevered and certified. I have lost track of him.

No. 10 Gary Phillips: Now living in Arizona and teaching combat, Gary is also a professional photographer, and was a big radio star.

Gary’s Reflection: As a wee lad, I found myself channeling Robin Hood, Captain Blood, Tyrone Power and, of course, Basil Rathbone. It was not unusual [for me] to paint on a pencil-thin moustache, for authenticity sake. After all, I was a Saturday afternoon matinee idol, if only in my own mind. And, honestly, it never occurred to me, that I would ever be an actor, much less a swashbuckler. It was just something I DID, as a kid. It was IN me.

As a teen, I found a dramatic arts path, beckoning me...compelling me. Most likely if you’re reading this, you have too. That led me to New York and J. Allen Suddeth, under who’s direction I found my first artistic home. Under his eye I became a swashbuckler. On his watch, I learned how to reconnect with that kid in the backyard, in the tree, on the fence . . . channeling Flynn. It truly was the most exciting time of my life . . . then and now.

On July 14, 1979, I had the privilege to be one of the first 12 test applicants for the Society of America Fight Directors. Really? They actually TEST for that? Somebody pinch me! I thought, not only do I get to LIVE my dream, but get CERTIFIED, as well.

It was a several hour test, as I recall. Slaps. Punches. Falls. Rolls. Rapier. Rapier/dagger. Rapier/cape. Seems a buckler was thrown in there, as well. Not only were our skill sets with the

weaponry and technique tested, [but] we were required to choreograph a scene using the aforementioned tools.

Having been trained by the best, there was one constant in my head . . . Allen’s voice saying “moment of danger.” I hadn’t the least bit of anxiety about the skill set tests; but, the choreography part . . . now, that was nerve-wracking. Would they like it? Would they toss me? Or even worse, would I embarrass the swashbuckling gods?

I passed! I was certified! And, I was thrilled. Somehow the judges overlooked the absolute lameness of the *Star Trek: Kirk/Spock/Klingon* scene I penned and were impressed enough to send me through. Thank God it wasn’t a writing competition.

That day, the SAFD officially made its mark without a drop of blood. More importantly, that kid in me was validated and lives, still, today!

No. 11 Kent Shelton: Kent became an expert horse wrangler and was a founder of The Hanlon Lees Action Theater, who ply their trade at Renaissance Faires. He also acted, was a stuntman and choreographed fights on and off-Broadway, for TV and Films. Offseason, he presides over the Wild West Knights’ Rest, the company’s headquarters and ranch in Luther, Oklahoma. He recently stunt doubled for Sam Shepard.

Kent’s reflection: In 1979, Robin Wood and I had been hired by the NY Renaissance Faire as fight choreographers, street fighters and by the end of the season to perform their first joust. That same year, we had met Allen Suddeth who told us about the fight test and asked if we were interested; to which we responded, ‘of course.’

We had already choreographed a rapier and dagger fight for the NY Renaissance Faire, so that was what we used for the fight test. As I remember there were about a dozen people there, including a few females. We all performed our fights that included some dialogue (I think Robin and I even wore costumes) and some comedy as well. Eric Fredricksen critiqued our fights before we were paired up with different partners and given a few phrases of a fight to work on, which were critiqued as well. It was all handled quite well, and it was exciting to be a part of the very first fight test by the SAFD.

No. 12 James W. Monitor: A Seattle theater actor for years, before moving to NY, Jim continued training with me long after this first test and became a staple player in Fights R Us, writing many of our sketches. He was featured in “A Night At The Fights,” in New York. He was a great mimic, actor, clown and fighter and knew movie history keenly. He passed about 2005.

It may seem odd now, but the SAFD testing American students was very controversial at the time. We were a new group after all. There was a lot of negative pressure from certain quarters, many letters written, even international meetings and pronouncements. At the end of the day, we won the right to test our own citizens and students, but it didn’t come easily.

An early issue of *The Fight Master*, No. 6 July 1979, contains an article written by David Boushey about the first test. In his article he recounts the desire for and decision to proceed with certification of student/combatants, “acknowledging them as worthy combatants (not choreographers)” and “that such certification should become a viable part of the society’s attempt to make [stage combat] an integral part of the whole theater scene.” The article also contains information from Erik Fredricksen regarding the structure of the test. He described the test as consisting of two portions:

A. A presentation by pairs of individuals of a fight they had been working on for some time, utilizing techniques and skills acquired in recent class work and previous study.

B. A short fight learned on the spot and taught to them by the examiner. In the interests of producing the reality of a



Top: Jim Manley (left), Jim Monitor (center) and SAFD Fight Director Ron Piretti (right) performing in “A Night At The Fights,” in New York City. Jim Manley and Jim Monitor took part in the first fight test and Ron tested few months later.

Above: J. Allen Suddeth’s “Recommended” Certificate of Proficiency awarded by the Society of British Fight Directors, with rare double signatures, those of Patrick Crean, and B. H. Barry.

Left: Tawnia Pettiford in For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When The Rainbow Is Enuf with Joseph Papp, NY Shakespeare Festival Producer, around 1979.

Little did I know the extent to which these “tests” would impact theatre and movement training in the decades to follow. These were very early days in the SAFD, before regional workshops, before the Internet, before reliable weapon suppliers, before teacher certification and only two years after the SAFD was founded. At that time, there were perhaps only about 50 members.

Flash forward in history . . . I have now judged around 500 fight tests, hosted as a teacher several hundred more, and seen around 500 to 1000 fights a year for over 30 years. That’s a lot of punches, lunges, parries and emotion. I’ve seen tears, blood, a tooth punched out by

a dagger, broken blades and missing partners. Those are the very few injuries and/or problems over the course of thousands of tests. Moreover and more happily, that’s a lot of hours of training by qualified SAFD Certified Teachers to whom I take my hat off. I have also kept up the tradition by training hundreds, perhaps thousands of students at the National Stage

Combat Work-shop, Rutgers, Lee Strasberg Institute and in private classes and regional workshops for over four decades. My student pass rate is 99.5 percent even after all these years.

1979 was a wonderful time, long ago. It’s too bad that we didn’t think to take a photo or video of the event, but we all realized on some level that we were breaking new ground that day. For all of you who have tested with the SAFD as well as those who will be tested in years to come and may read this, I’m pleased to share this remembrance and include you in the proud tradition started so many years ago.

Za!

Endnotes

1 I and my partner, A. C. Weary, tacked on to the end of a test at the Juilliard School, as a surprise to Paddy who didn’t know we were to appear, and performed three fights. We performed a scene we wrote ourselves, based on a fictional “cleaning up after a SBFD meeting.” I played then President, Henry Marshall, and A. C. played famous fight director Bill Hobbs. We even took the liberty to use costumes (three piece suits, bowler hats, wooden canes as rapiers and slop brushes as daggers). While sweeping up after the “meeting,” we even unscrewed large broom handles and used them as staffs. What fun we had putting it all together. Paddy thoroughly enjoyed watching our work and catching up, as we hadn’t seen him much since 1974.

2 It is worth noting that there is a discrepancy between the number of certificates awarded and Robin Wood’s recollection. Though there were 12 certificates awarded, J. Allen does recall partnering with Robin Wood due to an odd number of students present for this second portion of the test. It is possible that another student may have left early due to a prior conflict and still passed their test, however no definitive clarification was available at the time of this article’s publication.

work situation no member was allowed to perform this sequence with the same partner with whom he or she had performed the prepared portion of the presentation.

Mr. Boushey goes on to note his certainty “that this is only the beginning” and that he “look[ed] forward to an enthusiastic response from colleges and theaters throughout the country concerning future certification for students of stage combat.”

Today, Erik Fredricksen reflects that he “enjoyed the event GREATLY, and thought the kids and the teaching was grand.” In comparison with the current SAFD testing, this test provided “a much longer time actually working with [the students] which, I think, is something we perhaps have lost in later years; an actual visiting person, quite aside from the ‘paper’ awards, doing a workshop with them.”

Happy Birthday, SPT!!

By Joseph Travers, SAFD CT/FD



This past July 14th, the SAFD Skills Proficiency Test celebrated its 35th birthday! As described in the preceding article, twelve students of teacher J. Allen Suddeth passed the test on Bastille Day, 1979 to become the first ever Certified Actor/Combatants!

To commemorate this important anniversary, eight students at *Swordplay*, New York's longest running stage combat school, set out to renew their skills in the original fashion (five weapons, one scene) under the tutelage of three SAFD certified teachers – Ricki G. Ravitts (Small Sword), Joseph Travers (Broadsword, Unarmed), and Nathan DeCoux (Rapier/Dagger, Quarterstaff). All three teachers were ably assisted by Advanced Actor/Combatant Eugene Solfanelli, who also served as choreographic archivist. The testing students included Mr. Solfanelli, Madeline Lewis, Frances Pu, Meryn Anders, Giselle Chatelain, Jack McKeane, Kevin M. Little and Douglas S. Castillo.

The 35th Anniversary test was held on Sunday, July 13th, 2014 at Ripley Grier Studios, directly across the street from the location of the first test. Adjudicated by Maestro Suddeth, the event was attended by an appreciative audience, including CTs Dan O'Driscoll and Michael Johnson. Though he was not in attendance, Fight Master Erik Frederickson, adjudicator of the original test, sent his best wishes to all, and was very present in spirit.

After a strong showing in parts one and two (everyone passed!), Certificates were awarded to all, adorned with the same signet wax seal Maestro Suddeth gave to the first twelve certificates 35 years ago. Celebratory champagne was served with cake and cupcakes (prepared by the students), and Maestro Suddeth was presented with a sword to commemorate the 35 years he has devoted to helping students through the testing process.

The skills test was born out of a desire to strengthen and codify the teaching and learning of the stage fighting arts. After 35 years of changes, including re-namings, re-vampings and re-evaluations; after passing, not passing, recommending, renewing and Examiner's Awards; after Recognized, Certified, Basic and Advanced; after new teachers, new fight masters, new students and new weapons, the SAFD fight test still stands. May it serve as a testament to the founders of the SAFD, to teachers like Maestro Suddeth, and to all those who "strive to improve the art."

Happy Birthday, SPT! See you at 40!!



COMBAT in

Integrating Fight Choreography into the Collegiate Classroom **By Kate Busselle**

My phone lit up late on a Monday evening. It was a text from the instructor of the *Script Analysis* course for which I was TA. She had taken ill and would not be able to teach class the next day, so I had to fly solo. My mind began racing; should I cancel class altogether, or whip up a lesson plan on the spot? Both options had risk, but the latter had the possibility of a learning experience for both me and my students. Even though I felt nervous and scared, I decided to lead class on my own. By the end of class the next day, I had a student come up to me stating that mine was the best class he ever had. I was ecstatic. I'm no expert teacher by any means, so what was it that inspired this student so much in an introductory course?

Stage combat. The play? *Hamlet*.

I felt lucky with the assignment's timing.

I remember audible, collective groans when the students were instructed to read this play. Most of them had beaten *Hamlet* to a bloody, drab pulp in high school literature classes. For my class period, however, a hush came over the class and all students were eager and attentive to learn when I promised to examine *Hamlet* in a way that they never had before.

I explained to the class that we were going to approach script analysis from the perspective of a fight choreographer. For our one hour and fifteen minute class period, we would analyze the text of the duel in act five, scene two of *Hamlet*. For the in-class assignment, the students went line by line and determined what action needed to take place according to the dialogue Shakespeare had written. For example, at some point Hamlet needs to have Laertes' rapier in his possession, and must have cut Laertes with it to justify Laertes' line: "The treacherous instrument is in thy hand, / Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice / Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie, / Never to rise again" (Shakespeare 820). We eventually came up with a flow chart of the actions that absolutely needed to happen as dictated by the script. The difficulty in this process was that the students immediately wanted to add action to tell the story in a unique way (flinging swords clear across the room and doing back

handsprings to retrieve them or spraying bullets a la *Scarface*), but the goal was to lock in exactly what the script dictated. We needed the framework of the story Shakespeare wanted to tell before we could begin to build onto it. My goal with this initial exercise was to illustrate that we were analyzing the script in the same way we had been with any other script in the class (taking the text literally and interpreting meaning and intention from the playwright); we were just examining the basics through a different lens.

Having built our own fight, we turned to other interpretations, watching two film versions of the duel. The first was from Kenneth Branagh's four-and-a-half hour epic retelling, the second from the brief, more contemporary Gregory Doran version (which featured David Tennant). While both of these versions use incorrect weaponry (fencing swords instead of the rapier and dagger set as dictated in the script), both have very different, yet equally clear visions of the duel and how it evolves. We would pause, rewind, and watch again various parts of the fight, analyze the physical storytelling that the fight choreographer had chosen, and debate which version was more effective in the telling of the story. The students gravitated towards the Tennant version at first because the action was uninterrupted by Fortinbras' army approaching (which happens frequently in the Branagh version). However, when it came to examining character choices and physical storytelling, the students felt the picture was clearer with the Branagh version. This included non-duel based action, such as whether or not Gertrude purposefully or unwittingly drinks from the poisoned cup, or how Hamlet forces Claudius to drink from the same cup later. One student voraciously advocated for Patrick Stewart's (Claudius in the Tennant version) character choice of shrugging his shoulders before drinking from the poisoned cup because it has been previously stated in the scene that Hamlet's blade is envenomed and Claudius is struck with it. This action, to her, highlighted the futility of Claudius fighting any longer when his death is certain and near.

For the first time, many students realized the inner complexities within *Hamlet* that were beyond the basic plot points, or beyond whatever the teacher thought was the "right" interpretation of the play. Students were able to see beyond the text with the incorporation of stage combat into the curriculum and make their own cases for character choices, and each student was able to back those choices up clearly and with text. Violence is comprised of clear, decisive

CURRICULUM

choices, so students were easily able to latch on to character motivation and trace it back to the text and the playwright's intention. Violence is a language we all can understand, through script analysis or performance, without speaking a word. Violence is used when words are no longer enough to express how characters feel, so it often happens at the most exciting, climactic moment of the show. By exploring a character at their emotional peak in a violent act, we are able to connect to their most honest emotions and their truth, which is harder to decipher in scenes that characters must cover up how they truly feel and think. Violence is the easiest window in to discovering who these characters truly are.

I was floored by my students. I felt as though incorporating and analyzing stage combat kept their opinions malleable. They were able to see all sides of a scene, not settling for what was presented to them, but also hypothesizing other choices that could be more effective than the choices that were made by the fight choreographers. Some suggested that the fights themselves were too long and could have been shorter and more effective. Others advocated for longer fights because the suspense built up and sank too quickly.

When I announced that class was over, the students all seemed (gratefully) shocked that time flew by so quickly. They wanted to stay and keep discussing the choreography and potential choices and argue with each other about whose choices would tell a better story. Best of all, their conversations were based in script analysis. One student even came up to me after class and told me he wanted to pursue fight choreography and become a fight director because of our one class session. What truly told me that this lesson was successful is that for the first time in this semester, I saw light bulbs go off and gears start to turn for students that I had been unable to reach previously through traditional methods of script analysis. I was able to engage students I thought were always going to prefer their Facebook to my class, and the assignments following *Hamlet* were vastly improved in comparison to prior assignments.

In essence, we fulfilled the basic tenets of traditional script analysis, but used a fight choreography twist. If a teacher is working with a play containing violence, here is how such an approach can work in the classroom:

1. Select the text surrounding the fight scene, both before and after.
2. Break down the text and pull from spoken lines and stage


directions what the playwright has dictated must happen. Creating a flowchart of dictated character action with the class can be helpful for this step.

3. View at least two interpretations of the text, whether it is filmed productions or actual films of the play. An alternate to this (if your students are trained and capable) is to turn the choreography over to the students to come up with versions and have the class compare.

4. Discuss the versions. What worked? What didn't? What elements of the story were told in one version that were not told in another? Is one more effective, and if so, why? Make sure the students are using the text to support their stances.

5. Open the floor up to alternate interpretations. Remember a base in textual support is critical for script analysis.

It can be incredibly easy to take a common curriculum class like script analysis and stick to the basics of Freytag's pyramid and Aristotle's *Poetics*, but what good does that knowledge do for our students if we do not teach them how to apply these techniques to various career paths within theatre? That is the purpose of a course—to teach the students the principles so that they can apply them to their careers and future work. Why not lead by example and break down the process along with them, so they have an understanding of *how* to apply these principles to their careers. It can change what could have been a day of students half-listening while perusing Facebook to a day of critical thinking, storytelling, debate, and lively discussion.

Combat is a great channel to excite these students, because, let's face it, who doesn't like watching and arguing about a knock-down, drag-out fight? Trade out the broadsword for a whiteboard marker and immerse your students into the world of script analysis through fight choreography! 

Acknowledgements

I have to give credit where credit is due; I am not the originator of integrating stage combat into foundational theatre curriculum. This brilliant method was taught to me in a theatre history class during my last year as an undergraduate at Michigan State University by Zev Steinberg, who was guest lecturing in the class.

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The Three Things You Need to “Act the Fight”

BY ZEV STEINBERG

W

hy do so many fights on stage fail to move us? Why do we, as teachers, need to keep giving the same notes over and over again? Beyond great choreography and excellent technique, what needs to be present in order for a scene to be believable? All fight directors are after more or less the same thing, though we might use different methods to get there. We want believable, dynamic, and provocative scenes of violence that maintain the safety of the actors while continuing the story of the piece. We want excitement when the story calls for it, we want disturbing images when that is what's needed, and we want actors who can skillfully execute these scenes of violence without calling attention to their technique. Our barometer for success is the audience's focus on the scene and the *story* instead of the *technique*. So what's the secret? Fortunately, the secret is there is no secret-it's ACTING! All you have to do is act the fight.



Chris Coy biting Sarah Goeke in the Michigan State University production of *William Shakespeare's Land of the Dead*.

Is it really that simple? Ok, no. Acting isn't all that simple when it comes down to it. If it were, then there wouldn't be as many BFA and MFA Acting programs all over the world - one of which currently employs me to teach acting to undergraduates. There wouldn't be countless acting theory books, and numerous workshops on the craft of embodying the given circumstances of another character while living as that character in front of an audience. Acting is complicated. Acting takes training. Most actors require years and years of training before any of this becomes simple. So when we say, "act the fight!" how can we expect our combatants to take a note like that? How can I, as an actor, take that note when it's given to me? If acting is the crucial step to engaging the audience, what does it look like

when it's there? All three of these perspectives (the actor, the teacher/fight director, and the audience) must be considered.

Admittedly, every once in a blue moon, a performer who is both a great actor and a skilled combatant will fall in your lap, but sadly that is the exception to the rule. In most cases the performer is mediocre in one of those two areas. Furthermore, many stage combatants learn theatrical violence in the classrooms of universities, workshops, and the skills proficiency test (SPT) process. In this case they are looking to us, their teachers, to guide them through the process in its entirety- to provide them with ALL the tools they need to perform theatrical violence believably. Does this mean we need to become acting teachers in addition to being fight directors? Does a dialect teacher also need to teach acting?

As teachers it is our job to train actors in proper technique, in order that they can integrate the technique and command it. Throughout this exploration of technique it is essential that story-telling and acting choices be emphasized. Without it, all the greatest technique in the world won't give the audience what we want them to see. Stage combat is like dialect work. You must study and take command of specific verbal techniques in order to then use them as a character. If you have terrible technique the audience won't believe your character because they don't believe your dialect. If you have fabulous technique, but are not making acting choices, then the audience won't believe that you are a character in the first place. Our goal as teachers is to give our students a command of the dialect of violence and empower them with the tools they need to live and breathe as a character inside it.

This brings us back to the original question: do we, as fight directors need to teach acting? I believe the answer is yes, we do! The techniques in stage combat can't be performed believably without setting the conflict in the given circumstances of a story, and responding to the live impulses of your scene partner (aka acting). This presents a challenge to the choreographer. There are already at least 780 things to be thinking about at once when we perform stage combat - how can we do much more? How on Earth do we, as fight directors or



Above: Zev Steinberg and Adam Miller-Batteu at Winter Wonderland 2013 Staff Fights.

Opposite: Zev Steinberg watching Hunter T. Davis and Michael Gardner in rehearsal for Reefer Madness, by the Brown Paper Box Theatre Co in Chicago.

actor combatants, integrate all the skills and tools of acting theory into our already complicated realm of stage combat technique? Acting itself is already hard enough—never mind worrying about accidentally stabbing a scene partner!

This is precisely the question this article aims to answer. "Act the fight" is much too general and insurmountable a note to be useful to the actor combatant. What then can the actor tangibly focus on in their technique to sell the fight? What do I physically want the actors to do differently when I give them that note? The real question is: What is physically present in a violent scene when I believe it and I am engrossed as an audience member, and what is missing when I find myself unengaged and coldly analyzing the actor's technique?

Over the course of the last three years I have been seeking an answer to this question in the classrooms of the SAFD's regional workshops, National Stage Combat Workshop, University skills proficiency tests (SPTs) and renewals (SPRs), and the rehearsal rooms of over thirty shows. There are three elements that must be present in the scene for the violence to be effective: the actor must have *engaged breath*, the actor must be *vocally present*, and the actor must be consciously placing *intentioned focus* on the part of the story that they want the audience to follow. When these three elements are present the scene outshines the technique, or in other words, I believe the fight. When one of these are missing, the story is either unclear, or calls attention to itself as being "stage combat" and appears to be completely separated from the story that lead up to it.

ENGAGED BREATH

In the words of SAFD Certified Teacher Doug Mumaw: "You've got two choices: breathe...or die." Doug's words, although comical, hold a grain of truth. When you are breathing, you are open, you are



available, and you are present. The moment you hold your breath everything freezes. Your emotional connection is blocked, and your muscles hold tension. Everything gets harder when your breath is shallow or held.

These are not novel ideas by any stretch of the imagination. The study of movement and martial arts have always advocated for the control and release of one's breath. The simple act of a full exhale relaxes all the muscles that are not currently in use, releases tension, and calms the nerves. Step one in the process of acting a fight, is to free your breath. Freed breath is a release from tension (or simply breath that is held), and allows the actor to be in a state of relaxed readiness.

Once your breath is freed and available, you can then begin to engage the scene. You can start to breathe as your character instead of as yourself. Your breath is foundational. It is quite literally the life source of both you and your character¹. When you are holding your breath it is impossible to connect to the experience of the character because most of your body is belying the story you are physically trying to tell. Release your breath and two things will happen: first, everything gets easier, and second, your breath is now available to be informed and affected by the emotional life of your character. Cyrano's breath is quite different from Valvert's. Zorro breathes calmly while his opponents pant and cower. Aguecheek and Viola's shallow and terrified breath are the reason we understand their fear of one another. Release your breath, and you can begin to breathe as your character.

A third, wonderful thing happens when the actor releases his/her breath: the audience is welcomed into the scene. The actor's breath serves as the audience's window into the emotional experience of the character. The held breath is a closed vessel. Released breath fundamentally opens the actor to the room. Additionally, neuroscience research has revealed a phenomenon in the human brain called mirror neurons². These neurons physically mimic what

they perceive. This is why when you are watching someone who is very nervous, your own breath becomes shallow and quick or even held right along with him/her. The mirror neurons in your brain begin to mimic the breathing patterns of the people you are watching. This is a remarkable tool for the actor. By simply engaging your own breath in the emotional circumstances of your character, you can guide the audience into that same state. If the audience has no breath through which they can connect to your character, then all they will have to watch is your technique. When the audience is breathing the emotional stakes of your character, they are engaged in your story.

Step One: *Engage your breath in the given circumstances of your character and the scene.*

VOCAL PRESENCE

Tell me how many times you've seen this one before: the actors are doing a fantastic job, the stakes are high, the moment it clicking, voices are raised,

the characters are reaching a point of conflict where words are no longer enough, and then, suddenly the *stage combat begins*. The scene is abruptly almost completely silent. All the emotional work of the scene is lost while the fight happens. How many times have you coached a scene and had to give the note: "now add vocals?" And when you give that note, how many times do you end up with the infamous "grunts per move" syndrome where every single move is accompanied with the same "eugh" sound?

Vocal presence is a state in which the actor, through released and open breath, has made their vocal instrument available to respond to and participate in the theatrical event. When we ask the actor to add vocals, we don't want them to choreograph all the sounds they will make, nor do we want them to make the same sound over and over again. A believable soundscape is one that involves dynamic, supported, and open sounds emerging from the physical conditions of the scene. If the sounds don't match the stakes, we don't buy it. If the sounds don't match the physical story, we don't buy the physical story. In the same way that knapping is a critical element in performing the magic trick we call a left cross, the vocal soundscape is crucial to conveying the emotional journey of a character.

The journey to vocal presence begins with the release of the vocal instrument. From there, open, healthy sound should be introduced. This can start as senseless open vowels while working through the choreography. Eventually, as the actor begins to engage in the moments, these open vowels will change in direct response to the physical and psychological experience of the CHARACTER. To a degree, this cannot be choreographed, but instead must be discovered by the individual. To choreograph these sounds would strip them of their honesty. The best vocals will never be replicated, because the conditions under which they emerged can never happen again. A connected fight scene will never sound exactly the same twice. In order for the emotional story to be authentic, the actor must be vocally present enough to respond honestly and openly to



the actual moment being experienced on stage through the lens of their character.

Step Two: *Allow yourself to be vocally present.*

INTENTIONED FOCUS

Where breath and sound give us the emotional story of the character, it is the actor's focus that tells us what they're thinking. It is with my sound and focus that I can endow the *other* character with danger. If I frantically keep looking at the other character's face, their feet, their blade, their core, their face, their blade, etc., it gives the impression that I am desperate to know what they are going to do, thus endowing them with danger. If I calmly look in their eyes and nowhere else, then they are not perceived as being nearly as much of a threat. Likewise, it is with my focus that I can guide the audience through the story of the fight.

The audience will inherently look wherever I place my focus as the performer. This is a principle that magicians have employed for centuries³. If I look directly at a target, the audience will follow my eyes to that spot. If I look directly and overtly at the fist headed towards my face, the audience won't see my hands prepping the knap. This intentioned focus is achieved almost entirely with the eyes. However, even if you are not looking directly at something, the object of your focus can be perceived by the audience. For better or for worse the audience will follow whatever you, the performer, focus on. So if you have 90% of your focus on making sure you get that knap, then the audience will be watching you trying to knap. If instead your focus is on your character's intention, in the case of a fight, your opponent and fellow actor, then that is exactly what the audience will be following. Sounds like acting, doesn't it?

With my focus I can choose which parts of the physical event on stage I want the audience to take in. When receiving a slap on stage, the moment after the slap is the most critical moment of storytelling. In a desire to "do the technique well" this moment is all too often

Above: Collin Bresse at the 2011 National Stage Combat Workshop

Right: Fight Masters Ian Rose and K Jenny Jones at the 2011 National Stage Combat Workshop.

glossed over by the performer. After the slap I can grab my face and look downward, making sure to complete my head rotation to "tell the story of the slap" or I can take the focus off the technique and place it back in the scene by immediately looking right back in the eyes of my partner. The story changes from "I've been slapped!" to "You slapped me!" If my focus is on the scene, then that is what the audience will see. If my focus is on my technique, then that is precisely what they will watch.

Step Three: *Place your focus where the story is happening*

TECHNIQUE

Up to this point we have covered the three foundational elements for a successful, believable scene of violence on stage: 1) *Engaged Breath*, 2) *Vocal Presence*, and 3) *Intentioned Focus*. There is a fourth item on this list, which any fight choreographer would tell you and that is *Technique*. Indeed, no matter how good your acting may be, there are certain physical techniques necessary for each move in stage combat. However, just as in dialect work, if all you show is a demonstration of technique, then the audience won't care because they have no character to invest in. Thus, once you have the technique, your attention must go to the three things that will sell the fight: *Breath*, *Sound*, and *Focus*.

FOUNDATIONS AND PEDAGOGY

For the following section I will use the SAFD Skills Proficiency Test as the primary object of study. The SPT lends itself well to this kind



of inquiry because it is the closest thing to standardization in stage combat. All students in an SPT class must complete a minimum of 30 hours of training under an SAFD Certified Instructor, who teaches a series of predetermined compulsory techniques. This culminates in the performance of a piece of fairly standardized choreography containing these required moves, set to a scene from dramatic literature, for adjudication by the SAFD College of Fight Masters. The ideas discussed here can easily be extended to any stage combat classroom or rehearsal process.

After personally participating in the SPT process over 25 times and having observed the process countless times, I have found that of the minimum 30 hours, roughly 22-27 of those hours are spent on technique (fundamentals, specific moves, and choreography) leaving the remaining 3-8 hours for scene coaching (aka: acting). Almost every fight director will agree that stage combat is 20% technique and 80% acting. Perhaps they will argue about the exact ratio, but the point stands. Acting is critical to the successful storytelling of theatrical violence. Why then is so little time devoted to it in the stage combat classroom?

Admittedly, it is the role of the teacher of an SPT to teach the specialty that is stage combat. The students do not come to SPT

classes to learn how to act any more than they'd attend a workshop on the Russian dialect and expect to learn acting theory. However, if the keys to the execution of this craft are acting techniques, then certain acting techniques need to be integrated into the stage combat curriculum.

The classic method for teaching stage combat techniques is to break each technique down into simple, digestible pieces that the student can practice, and to keep layering on more and more elements until they have the whole technique. After they have enough techniques, a phrase of choreography is put together and then maybe at that point acting is mentioned. For example, when teaching singlesword, often the first things covered are the parries. These are learned standing still in one place without a partner, moving the sword from one parry to another. Then the cutting technique is taught, along with the targets, and the students cut towards one another out of distance. Eventually the parries and the cuts are put together, and then after that, movement of the feet is introduced. The problem here is that by the time movement is introduced the student has to relearn all the muscle memory of the parries in the first place because his/her body is no longer in the same position as it was when drilling the parries alone. Furthermore, the actual place

that the parry happens is much farther out in front of the body when in practice with a partner than it is when floating in the free space of a solo drill. Once again, muscles need to be retrained.

To a beginning student, the "simple" isolated techniques are just as complicated as the full techniques; it is a completely foreign language of body movement. Learning each move in isolation requires the student to reteach their muscles each time another element is added. All of this repetition before the final collection of elements creates muscle memory that the student never wants to use on stage. This is a poor use of precious training time if the majority of it involves body shapes and patterns of movement we never intend to use. It is much more efficient to approach the entire technique as a whole at a pace at which the student can be successful. This is why at the SAFD National Stage Combat Workshop FM Richard Ryan never allows his students to drill the parries with their feet planted in one place, and FM K Jenny Jones teaches parallel parries on the move as the very first technique on day one of rapier and dagger.

In the previous sections of this article I outlined three distinct tools for acting any stage combat technique. The means by which we can make acting an integrated part of the stage combat curriculum is simply to employ these principles in the teaching of the techniques to begin with. For example: when teaching a two-hand strangulation, include in the technique looking back into the other person's eyes, the aggressor breathing heavily with effort, and the victim with vigorous failed attempts at getting air. The eyes, diaphragm, and vocal folds are muscles just as much as the arms and hands, and they need to be integrated into the muscle memory that is a two-hand strangulation. When teaching a slap with a victim knap, include the breath patterns and targets of focus of both parties. Both inhale as the cue hand rises, the victim's eyes move to the cue hand and the aggressor's eyes move to the cheek bone, both parties exhale as the slap is thrown, allowing motivated sound to be generated, the victim knaps, throws their head, then immediately looks right back in the eyes of the aggressor on a rapid inhale, etc. Do not let the students practice this without the breath, sound, and focus. Isolating out specific elements and practicing them separately only generates muscle memory that they will not want to use on stage. The student needs to work at a pace in which they can do all these things in sequence over and over in order to build a muscle memory that includes ALL of these things. If the student doesn't address all the elements of the technique, including the acting of it at this point in the training, they will not be able to integrate it later; at best they can lay it on top of the technique.

In a 30 hour SPT class where a beginning student has learned an overwhelming amount of brand new body movements, memorized

challenging choreography, has put together a scene, and is now facing the nerves and stakes of testing in the weapon discipline with their partner's and their own success on the line, to give a note like: "ok, now add vocals" is useless. First of all, vocals can't simply be "added." If they are added at this point, the best you can hope for are unmotivated grunts. Vocals must be discovered not added. In order for that to happen the vocal folds must be available for sound in the moment. Waiting until dress rehearsal to mention vocals is asking the student to go back and rewire every piece of muscle memory in the choreography to include his/her vocal instrument. There simply isn't enough time, the student won't slow down enough to do it, and there are already 780 other things to be thinking about in the moment. It is precisely for this reason that so many SPTs are painfully quiet, and why breath and sound must be integrated at the time that the muscle memory of the technique is first explored.

The practice of breath, sound, and focus also gives the students a way to make the drilling portions of class more engaged and conscious. While drilling a box cutting pattern, for example, the instructor can encourage the students to focus on engaged breath for the next few rounds, or vocal presence and sound, etc. If these three elements are constantly highlighted in the teaching of the techniques then the students are empowered with the keys to know how to take the inevitable note, "act the fight," later in their careers.

CONCLUSION

There is no such thing as a comprehensive and final answer to how to act a fight, but there are certainly patterns of qualities present in violent scenes that tell a story, vs. episodes of stage combat that call attention to themselves for being just that: stage combat. The scene is just as loud and just as committed as the moment before the fight. The story is clear and the stakes are present. The emotional life of the character is the driving force of the scene. When the actor combatant can place their energies on actively engaging in the scene instead of monitoring their combat technique, the audience follows them right into the story. With engaged breath, vocal presence, and intentioned focus, the actor has specific tools to find a connection to the live dramatic moment, helping the actor to finally get off the technique, and get back into the scene.

Endnotes

- 1 Linklater, K. (1976). *Freeing the natural voice*. New York: Drama Book Specialists.
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Toward an Honest Hamlet

The “Continual Practice” in Your Studio

BY JIM STARK

WHEREVER PRACTITIONERS and teachers of stage combat gather and converse, we always hear about some troubling production in which the lead performer has little or no training in stage combat. In these cases, the trained actors in the cast carry the load of making the fights work for the audience. We shake our heads about the leading actor and complain about the casting.



We're always Laertes, never the Dane. Our best students—actors of skill, energy and focus—are cast for the purpose of making a hesitant Hamlet look like a skilled swordsman, or set to growling out Fortinbras' lines and serving as a fight captain. We know these students are capable of more, and we suspect that the actor (of either gender) playing Hamlet does not have the skills we would hope to see in the performance of a major classical role involving swordplay. How does this happen, and why does the problem continue after decades of stage combat training in universities and workshops? One answer to these questions is to be found in the culture of our studios. Too often, we, the instructors, foster an atmosphere that is psychologically toxic to the kind of actors who end up playing Hamlet. We drive them away, and then complain about their absence. We can do a much better job of pursuing the Society's mission by clearing the foul and pestilent congregation of vapours from our studios.

Consider the learning styles of the two types. The actor most likely to be cast as Hamlet is highly verbal, with exceptional skills in spoken expression and a deep love of reading. He is likely to be what a contemporary psychologist would call a "Highly Sensitive Person" (HSP), whose emotional life is vivid and mercurial. He is probably an introvert with superb powers of observation and perception. Hamlet watches the people around him very closely, and is deeply affected by their attitudes and actions. Hamlet sees every move Laertes makes, and perceives the similarities and differences in the two personalities. Compared to most people, Hamlet is graceful and moves with purpose, but compared to Laertes, in the studio, Hamlet is a less assertive, and takes longer to memorize the choreography.

Laertes is a natural athlete who never seems to need to practice in order to pick up new skills. She is enthusiastic about swordplay, but quickly bored with repetitive exercises. He learns choreography instantly, and because of his tremendous gift in that area she tends to think that anyone who doesn't learn so quickly is not trying very hard. Still, Laertes loves the studio, spends as much time in stage combat classes as possible, wants to be a teaching assistant and, soon, to teach classes of her own. Laertes may even be heard to say "Stage combat is *mine*, I own this." She has a good voice and strong technique as an actor, but in acting classes she doesn't often find the kind of spark in a scene that Hamlet sheds like a welding torch.

Most teachers are the Laertes type. That fact makes sense, of course. We all tend to focus on our strengths and to spend more time doing the things that make us feel successful and competent. Especially for our students, though, we must remember the vital necessity of working on the weak areas. When it comes to study, and to art, the hard way is better than the easy way. However, we can't persuade our Hamlets to stay on the difficult path if we create an environment that they find unbearable.

How can we Hamlet-proof the studio? Some suggestions follow.

Be female.

Our students will gain many advantages from having more female role models, teachers and leaders in the art of stage combat. If being female is impossible for you, try at least to be an encouraging mentor rather than a judgmental drill sergeant. (Guys, relax! The students already *know* you're better than they are.)

Be less talented.

A teacher who began with less natural talent and has acquired his skills through long, hard effort is more able to relate to Hamlet than a teacher whose innate gifts helped him to leap over the early stages of training. If you can teach advanced students, that's great; but can you teach beginners? That's where you find Hamlet. See George Leonard's *Mastery* for a description of students (he uses an old horse-training metaphor) who begin with different levels of facility. The best "horse" is the one who has required the most training, because that student has developed more discipline, more awareness and more insight into the work than any of the others. Hamlet is a "fourth horse" who has less native ability, but will perform brilliantly after long, dedicated practice.

Talk about acting.

You're training actors, not killers. Of course you know this, but all too often the talk in the studio devolves to gratuitous celebrations of gore and comic-strip depictions of suffering. Hamlet finds it all too easy to imagine the many people around the globe who are, at any given moment, suffering real torture and violence. He is likely to find jokes about inflicting injury (and the accompanying laughter) alarming, and perhaps even revolting. Remember that, in life, there are no giggling victims.

Show and tell.

Teach with words, in addition to demonstrations. Describe the physical actions and the sensations that come with them. Hamlet observes closely, but loves words and can suit the action to the word, the word to the action.

Demand orderly behavior during break times.

Every studio has a pair who can't stand to stand down. As soon as their teacher calls a break, they dash into an open space and start wrestling, boxing and trying out the latest techniques from their martial arts practice. They hit hard, screech in pain, work up real anger and come back to class bloody. Hamlet feels an instinctive alarm (perhaps even horror) at the sight of this open conflict. While she knows at the conscious level that the behavior is relevant to the studio, her highly sensitive unconscious demands that she get as far away from it as possible, immediately. You've just lost Hamlet because of those two bozos.

Teach Laertes better cueing.

Laertes learns choreography quickly and assumes that everyone else does, too. He doesn't even need to pay close attention to his partner in order to know what comes next in the phrase. Hamlet, however, watches his partner minutely. After all, that's what acting is, in his mind: he observes and responds to the slightest hint from his partner. Laertes draws her rapier back for a horizontal slash across the belly, but Hamlet sees the details (such as the angle of the wrist or of the blade) that suggest an upward diagonal slash, instead. Now, Hamlet *knows* that the belly slash is supposed to happen, but sees his partner cueing for something else. His eyes go wide and he freezes, as if Polonius had forgotten to say "What read you, my lord?" Laertes sees this uncertain look on Hamlet's face and thinks "This jerk doesn't even know the choreography." He breaks off with a grunt of disgust or a condescending, cold smile. Hamlet has to admit that *he's* the one who upset the rhythm, so he doesn't complain about the wrong cue he received. Hamlet goes away doubting his own understanding of the work, doubting his partner's reliability and doubting the process.

Kick Laertes out of class.

If you have a student who has great gifts for movement, a fine figure, a good voice and a feeling for humanity, send her away. Tell her to go take a Shakespeare text course and a verse-speaking class, and to read fifty plays from all periods of theatre history. Then, after she has turned up at twenty-five auditions for non-fighting roles, she can come back to class. Maybe she still won't play Hamlet, but her physical vitality and healthy habits will keep her strong enough to play Lear at the age when "Hamlet" is unable to carry that Cordelia into the final scene.

Trust Hamlet's vision.

Hamlet is probably a better *observer* of stage combat than anyone else in your class, including you. Laertes can

learn the choreography just by watching, but Hamlet sees the degree of intensity, intention and responsiveness in every tiny movement. Hamlet perceives the very soul of the work, and can apply it to a scene. Hamlet knows how to act the fight, because Hamlet knows how to *act*.

Get humble.

We're too proud of our ability to note the students with exceptional talent for movement. Anybody can do that, and Hamlet can do it better than we can. The fact is, we don't know which students will be the most skilled in five or ten years' time. See Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking: Fast and Slow* for an informed analysis of the difference between short-term success in the eyes of an instructor and long-term success in "field conditions." The stars of the studio are seldom the leaders in "real world" situations.

Teach the ones who need it.

It's fun to spend time with gifted students, and they do learn. On the other hand, less gifted students have the chance to learn much, much more. Again, George Leonard's *Mastery* can be helpful. In one chapter, he discusses the deadly errors he made as a WW2 flight instructor, spending all of his time on the talented students who needed little instruction, and almost no time or effort with less gifted students, whose lives would soon be at risk in battle. A good teacher who spends time with the students who need it most will make a greater impact on the "big picture" of the art of the theatre. We can turn the Society's mission into reality, every day, in every studio and rehearsal hall.

Almost every Hamlet you've ever seen is an arrant knave when he says "I have been in continual practice." You can make an honest Dane of him. Teach your Hamlets.

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On Adapting Historic Fighting Techniques to the Stage

BY STEVEN SCHWALL, AAC

There is a movement in the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) of late to try and make our fights more historically accurate by introducing techniques found in the martial arts manuals of historic Europe. It is, I believe, in response to two phenomena. The first is the emergence in the last 15 years of accessibility to original manuscript material (and translations of some of it into English for those of us who do not read Medieval German or Early Italian) by such scholars

as Christian Tobler and Jeffrey Forgeng. The second is that the wider dissemination of this information has increased the sophistication of several segments of our audiences. We of the fight community talk laughingly about Errol Flynn's *Robin Hood*, with its Hollywood single-sword style using a broadsword (single handed), but our audiences have become smarter, too, and some of them have begun to laugh at our fight construction. They notice deliberately off target strikes and techniques which are not idiomatic to the weapon. So,



did over many generations). The beauty of 20th century tournament play was that it was made safe enough so that mistakes could be learned from, as they were not injurious or fatal.

This brings me to the greatest pitfall in adapting historic sword-play to the stage: safety. When the manuals began coming out, we of the HEMA community (and remember, at that time there wasn't an officially "named" community) discovered that a number of techniques we had developed were just plain wrong in terms of historical accuracy. They were effective within the confines of our tournament rule set. The reason for this was not only ignorance, but the very rule set itself. The rules were designed so that the combatants would not get injured or killed in the process of competition. In adapting to the rule set, the techniques altered in their development so as to not be injurious or fatal. A HEMA instructor I know, who is also an accomplished martial artist, refers to this as the "Kendo syndrome." The sport of Kendo, he maintains, has very little if any resemblance to Kenjutsu swordsmanship, because the rules and protective equipment involved prevent the pure execution of proper technique. He notes that at many Karate competitions, the students can execute perfect katas, but when point scoring is on the line in a match, all that technique is lost. The moment you impose a rule set on a martial art other than that for which it was designed, the art alters. The same is true for adapting these techniques to the stage. Many of the German Longsword techniques, for instance, are designed to enable a thrust to the face as a finishing act (I would say having a sword point in my eye would be a fight ender, yes?). But we in the SAFD are taught to never threaten the face. So how do we reconcile this? Obviously, the technique must be altered.

Another facet of safety is control. I once attended a workshop in which a Broadsword class was offered in historic technique. The class focused on the *mordschlag*, or "death stroke" of the German longsword tradition. For those who do not know, the *mordschlag* is a technique which requires that the sword be grasped by the blade down near the point and swung like an axe to bring the hilt (where all the mass of the weapon is) crashing down on the opponent's head or collar bone. Martially speaking, this is a technique which would probably only be employed if there were a reasonable certainty of success, because recovering from it would be difficult. How do we make such a technique safe? Sure, we can have the intended target avoid the blow, but what about all that mass? You are holding a thin steel bar by a tapering surface with four pounds of steel at the far end. Can you really execute this technique with full intent without hitting the stage floor with what amounts to a pickaxe? Or, as my mentor, CT Lewis Shaw, so often says, "Can a LORT B actor with little to no training do it?" The possibilities of a broken stage with flying splinters, or worse, a shattering weapon sending fragments of steel flying are all too real. And I shudder to think about if the cue/reaction/action sequence fails.

This brings me to another pitfall in adapting historic work to the stage: incomplete scholarship. You cannot go find a manual on the internet, look at a few pictures and read a cursory interpretation and expect to present the technique in a fight. There is a Japanese philosophy of swordsmanship which runs (forgive me if I err), "You must make a thousand cuts for a thousand days to understand a single stroke." This is not something you can learn in a weekend. You have to not only look at the pictures, but *read the texts*, which is even more difficult, because they are written in cryptic verse, and there are often bad translations. I have been studying and working with this material for over three decades, and to date I only have two and a half 90-minute classes developed, and even those are still developing. I know people who make this material their life's work and it is

we have a reason to change and the tools with which to change. But there are dangers to just flying into the change as quickly as possible.

I am a practitioner of what has now been come to be known as Historic European Martial Arts (HEMA) for over 30 years. I was practicing the art before it even had a name and before the manuals had been extensively translated and distributed. Without benefit of manuals, we learned by discovery which techniques worked and which did not (probably a compressed version of what our ancestors

constantly evolving. Also, there is as much bad information (if not more) on the internet as good. Bad translations abound, and many translators do not understand swordsmanship, so they translate literally, which often does not make sense to the martial artist. Many interpreters work off of only one manuscript, rather than studying all of the related material. In the German longsword tradition, for instance, there are over a half dozen primary manuscripts. Remember, these *fechtmeisters* (fight masters) were also attempting to garner patrons, so their works are also padded with “secret techniques” which are unique to them and usually not martially sound, but could potentially get them a job. Some manuscripts are not even complete systems, but only a series of techniques.

Also, not reading the text fully makes you miss an important part of the system of the art, the footwork. There is almost as much text devoted to how to move as to how to manipulate the weapon. Without this piece of the scholarship, you risk using a technique that could be potentially dangerous.

If you go back to the historic texts and look at the techniques, they are designed to end the fight as quickly and efficiently as possible. This can be troublesome to us as theatrical fight arrangers. Our audiences want to actually *see* the fight, watch it ebb and flow, and see the characters embodied in the physical conflict. Even when we know who will win (we know that Romeo will kill Tybalt), we don’t know *how*, and so we watch to see how it unfolds. Can you imagine how our audiences would react if the fight were over in the space and speed of a modern fencing point? Our audiences would be spending time wondering what just happened, and miss something crucial as the story moved on. They would spend the rest of the evening trying to catch up, and leave the theater frustrated and unfulfilled.

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So we cannot end the fight too quickly, and therefore cannot use the techniques completely accurately.

So how do we adapt historic technique to the stage? First, you must discard all notions of “historic accuracy.” Do you recall the scene in *Kingdom of Heaven* where Balin’s father (Liam Neeson) is teaching him to fight? He uses techniques from the Italian school, and even names them. Do you ever see him use them again aside from the brief duel in the desert after the shipwreck? No. In the heat of battle, when lives are on the line, technique flies out the window. So abandon all thought of pure historic technique. What you can do is analyze the nature of the historic movement. Here are some considerations:

What is the line of attack? Is it safe to employ? Many techniques are meant to threaten the face and hands. These movements will need to be altered for safety. Depending on staging, offline attacks might be used, or the target of the attack is shifted to the shoulder, but played by the defender as a facial attack

How does the footwork affect the technique? Footwork is a big deal in the texts. Perhaps the footwork can be altered in order to use the sword technique safely. In my class on the German *meisterhauen* (master cuts) I have a demonstration of the *zwerchau*, or “scalp cut.” The cut is designed to slice across the head at about the hairline. When I demonstrate the actual technique (slowly, for the sake of my assistant), I still get an audible gasp and a “whoa.” The technique is quick and effective. But when I teach its adaptation for use, an alteration of the direction of the footwork maintains safe distance while still looking vicious. I have given the flavor of historical accuracy to the exchange, without the fatal intent built into the technique.

What about measure (distance)? In the German texts, techniques are begun out of weapon range, but the philosophy is to counter a cut with another cut, not a parry. In cutting the footwork follows the blow. So if both combatants are cutting, both are also advancing, which will close distance to inside of weapon’s length very quickly. This flies in the face of safe distance as practiced in the SAFD.

What is the follow-up technique? In the above mentioned scenario, both combatants cut into what is called a “bind” (not as defined in the SAFD glossary, but instead the weapons are simply in contact). Once in the bind, choices must be made depending on who is strong (pushing harder) or who is weak (not resisting). The manuals employ winding techniques to manipulate the sword into position to drive the point home, usually in the face or throat. This would call for actor combatants in close quarters manipulating long swords close to faces. There was a terrible accident in a sparring session at a HEMA convention just a few years ago, where a fighter took a wooden longsword waster to the eye socket. Even with wooden swords, these techniques *work*. It was a small miracle that the combatant escaped without permanent loss of the eye (I should note that fencing masks have become standard gear at all such events since). So, if distance is closed, some type of separation must be choreographed before further bladeplay is employed.

My point is that you simply cannot take a technique and insert it into a fight, because the technique in its pure form is designed to maim or kill. You must understand how the technique is applied to do its work, and then alter the movement parameters to keep you actors safe.

I applaud the SAFD instructors for attempting to bring more historical work to the stage. But just like adapting any martial art (and I know many are practitioners of various other arts), remember that the pure art is designed to do terrible things. You must fully understand how it works before you can adapt it to the stage safely. —

Instant Prince of Cats

Combining
non-traditional
casting with a
non-traditional
weapon in
Shakespeare's
Romeo & Juliet.

By Benjamin Curns, AC

Chris Johnston as
Benvolio and John
Harrell as Tybalt
rehearse *Romeo and
Juliet*, 2013.

Shakespeare's early tragedy *Romeo & Juliet* presents a number of constants not only for actors and fight directors but indeed for all Western culture. In American English classes, it is frequently the play used to introduce students to Shakespeare. It is a standard title for classical theatre companies, both amateur and professional. This seems especially true when a company's coffers begin to run a bit low. Within the last year, there were two major productions put on in New York, as well as Julian Fellowes' film adaptation. For the stage violence community, *Romeo & Juliet* serves as a sort of rite of passage. Anyone working in fight direction or performance of stage violence will, at some point, have to come face to face with Shakespeare's tale of "brawling love."

With the themes of love and violence, it seems fairly clear why this play maintains its popularity. In addition to frequency of production, there is a considerable amount of fighting to be found within those two hours of stage traffic. There is, of course, the opening street fight of Act I, scene 1, a fight which at the very least requires six combatants (Gregory, Sampson, Balthasar, Abrahm, Benvolio, and Tybalt), not to mention the faction of non-fighting characters who, while serving the story, might take up valuable real estate on stage (Lord and Lady Capulet, Lord and Lady Montague, Prince Escalus and his retinue). In Act III, scene 1, we see the back-to-back duels involving, at the very least, Mercutio, Tybalt, Benvolio, and Romeo. Finally, in Act V, Romeo duels once again, but this time with Juliet's suitor Paris. Many productions will add to this already impressive workload by incorporating violence that is somewhat less than text based, or at least not required by stage direction. For instance, a director may want Lord Capulet to slap Tybalt in the grand party scene (see Baz Luhrman's 1996 *Romeo + Juliet*), or have Friar Laurence slap Romeo to cure him of his "blubbing and weeping" late in Act III (used effectively in Jim Warren's 2007 production at American Shakespeare Center; CT Colleen Kelly was Fight Director).

On top of the sheer number of fights and combatants productions of *Romeo & Juliet* present, fight directors are faced with additional factors out of their control. This can include the size of the playing space, the quality of the weapons being used, and perhaps most importantly, casting. What level of fight experience do the actors bring with them, if any? An actor struggling with the basics of speaking verse and walking in period clothes will often require more attention (read: rehearsal time) from the director which may eat into the fight director's time of crafting believable and dramatic fights. Furthermore, one must account for any number of other factors, like an actor's past injuries, left handed fighters partnering with right-handed fighters, the combatant's proximity to audience, etc.

Luckily, as fight director for the American Shakespeare Center's 2013 production of *Romeo & Juliet*, I was lucky to avoid any serious problems with the issues I just mentioned. The cast was young, healthy, and experienced. Still, I was faced with what I considered to be pleasantly unique challenge in our Tybalt. Playing the hot-blooded Prince of Cats was an actor named John Harrell. I have had the distinct pleasure of working with John on literally dozens of productions. He is an actor of tremendous talent and considerable experience, having played the title roles in *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, and *Volpone* among others. However, at 43 years old and standing at 6'3", I didn't see him as a traditional "Prince of Cats." More specifically, I didn't see John performing the flashy "cat-like" fencing with which the character is usually associated.

In retrospect, I was wrong to make this assumption so early in the game, but at the time I got hung up on this thought. I couldn't tell if my concerns were entirely text based or simply an inexplicable discomfort with casting against type. To be clear: I wasn't at all worried about



John's attitude towards the work or even his skill as a combatant. He had trained with JP Scheidler, fought an exceptionally good duel under the fight direction of Colleen Kelly and Jeremy West as Hamlet, and showed a great deal of focus and enthusiasm when I had directed his rather comic fight against Guiderius when he played Cloten in the ASC's 2012 production of *Cymbeline*. So why was I so concerned? It all boiled down to those damn lines about cats.

John Harrell as Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*, 2013.

I had no doubt that by the time the show opened, John could and would fight as one sings prick-song, butcher a silk button, perform a superb punto reverso, and be the duelist that Tybalt must be. However, Mercutio's animal imagery associating Tybalt with the cat seemed to me more difficult to reconcile:

"More than Prince of Cats." *Romeo & Juliet* II.iv, 19

"Tybalt, you ratcatcher..." *Ibid.* III.i 76

"Good King of Cats, nothing but one of your nine lives..." *Ibid.* III.i 78

"...a cat to scratch a man to death..." *Ibid.* III.i 102

At the time, I believed it was basically John's size that I felt would not gel with these metaphors. His frame and legs are long and he possesses a body image that suggests power and strength rather than speed and agility. *Looking back, it is more likely that concern over my own large size and body image made me less than confident in trying to create and teach more cat-like movements.* Whatever the case, I set about to help make John our Prince of Cats. Why would anyone in Verona look at this man and associate him with the movements and behavior of cats?

I started by asking myself what is dangerous about cats besides their speed and agility. The answer came clearly: their claws. Cats use their claws to protect themselves and deter potential enemies from closing distance. Could Tybalt be outfitted with a weaponized claw of some kind? I thought of the Sabretooth character from *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (dir. Gavin Hood). He was large, incredibly powerful, and yet his main ordnances were the razor-like nails at the end of his fingertips. If I wanted to utilize that concept in this production, I would need to find an apparatus that would read theatrically as

claws capable of inflicting bodily harm while remaining secure on the actor's left hand.

I shared this idea with the production's incredibly talented costume designer, Erin M. West. As I was aware that the show was to be in modern dress, I felt there was perhaps more leeway in this choice of weaponry. In a stroke of good fortune, West had recently designed costumes for ASC's production of Shakespeare's *King John*. In that production, the Duke of Austria was outfitted with a lion's head and paw as part of his costume. In her search for those items, West remembered that she had come across something that she rightly thought could be of use to our upcoming *Romeo & Juliet* (which she was also designing).

It was a pair of leather gloves, one of which featured an exposed palm, a metal buckle to secure it on the hand, and some two-inch black nails on the end of each finger. It was almost too perfect: the nails were long enough to be seen by most of the audience, the strap and strength of the buckle meant the actor could swing his hands wildly and would be in no danger of the glove slipping off, and the exposed palm was almost unnoticeable, meaning the wearer could believably use his gloved hand for hand parries while leaving exposed flesh for what turned out to be fantastically loud skin-on-skin knaps. I loved it. I remember thinking that at four feet tall or seven feet tall, *any* combatant who wore such a weapon would rightly be associated with cats.

I presented my fight ideas with the production's director, ASC Artistic Director, Jim Warren. Warren was adamant that despite the show's modern dress look, there was simply too much text about swords and swordplay not to include rapiers of any kind. I certainly agreed; I only suggested that instead of a standard dagger as Tybalt's secondary weapon, it could be this claw. I shared my "cat quandry" with Warren, explaining how I thought this weapon could *serve* the text rather than distract from it, and ultimately give our actors and our audiences something which they had likely not seen before. Finally I asked Jim how Mercutio describes the wound he suffers at the hands of Tybalt. He smiled slowly and said softly, "A scratch... a scratch." When I showed him the picture of the claw, Warren was sold. "Yes," he said. "I want this."

We created an "Instant" Prince of Cats. It should be noted that initially the nails of the glove were actually quite sharp and any scratches to a combatant's body would be painful and most likely leave marks on exposed skin. West met this challenge by coating each of the nails in black Plasti Dip, a synthetic rubber used frequently on tool handles. This allowed us to keep every visual appeal of the glove while removing a good deal of potential danger of injury.

Once this measure was taken, the glove served the production and the actor wonderfully. For instance, in Tybalt's first appearance in the play, Harrell used the gloved hand to indicate and point at the "heartless hinds" littered about the stage. This seemingly simple choice is actually quite complex: by using the claw, he shows the Montagues and the audience that he is armed and dangerous, but he does this without drawing his primary weapon. It proved a deliciously manipulative move on his part: he was *certainly* threatening Benvolio and his cohorts, but to the casual observer, he hadn't yet drawn a weapon. By the conclusion of his fight with Benvolio, Tybalt used the claw to lacerate the top of Benvolio's hand. The production saw Romeo notice the wound in the following scene. The specificity of the four cuts left little doubt as to the perpetrator's identity.

In Act III, the claw was used to fatally wound Mercutio's midsection as Romeo obstructed him. In his dying moments Mercutio says of his murderer, "Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, *a cat to scratch a man to death.*" *Romeo & Juliet* III.i 101-102 (emphasis mine). The line maintained and strengthened one metaphor while losing the other. Of course


Tybalt wasn't an *actual* cat, but *had* actually "scratched a man to death." While Mercutio issued his curses on both houses, the audience could reflect on all of the Tybalt-as-cat imagery, now spot-on in accuracy.

When Tybalt returned to fight with Romeo, our choreography saw Romeo address the danger of the claw-hand by swiftly breaking the arm and driving the nails into Tybalt's own midsection *multiple* times. When Lady Capulet discovers her dead nephew's corpse she exclaims, "*Some twenty of them fought in this black strife / And all those twenty could but kill one life*" *Romeo & Juliet* III.i 180-181. Of course we know that her description of events is incorrect, but by using the claw, her perceived version of events is perhaps more plausible. As the claw would provide four or five punctures with every thrust, Tybalt's corpse would be riddled with bleeding wounds!

Actors are often told by directors and coaches that the answers are in the text; always go back to the text. The same holds true for those of us working in fight direction. The text presented a certain challenge and was met by a group of theatre artists who worked together to meet that challenge. The claw proved to be an easy weapon to incorporate into the world of swordplay as a choreographer and it gave our rather "un-feline" actor a device that would serve him as an actor, a character, and a combatant. His fighting proved to be remarkable and I like to believe that the claw added to his confidence and specificity of style. It also proved to justify *other* character's assertions, characterizations, and reactions. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it gave our audiences something new: a new idea in a play with which they are so very familiar. ✦

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Benjamin Curran as the Bastard in *King John*. Photo by Michael Bailey.

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SWORD-WIELDING WOMEN IN THE PROPAGANDA IMAGES OF WORLD WAR I

BY HEIDI WOLF

Prologue

I took my first stage combat class because I saw a picture of someone who looked like me. It was a poster for one of Richard Lane's Academy of the Sword workshops, featuring a photograph of a woman who was crouched high in mid-air, rapier in her hand, as her fight partner's sword blade slashed past her. That image led me into a classroom where I found a life- and career-changing vocation.

Now, almost 25 years later, one of my continuing goals as a Certified Teacher is to expand the population of those who can envision themselves as stage combatants. Having experienced the power of an inclusive image, I want my students to see a path they too might follow. To that end, I routinely post a diverse array of stage-combat-related images in the classroom, so that all of my students (women and people of color as well as white men) may see themselves and each other represented.

In my ongoing search for images to make my classroom a more welcoming place, I recently found myself in an unexpected byway which combined art history, political history, and cultural history: the propaganda posters of World War I. Dozens of images of women, brandishing swords and shields, lent their support to the calls from all sides of the conflict to enlist, to buy war bonds, and to labor on the home front. These images are particularly useful as examples of women wielding the "heavy weapons" of the SAFD. I will discuss a few of these images in detail in this essay; but first I would like to unpack the reasons for my search for these and similar images, and summarize the context in which these particular images originally appeared.

Given Circumstances

Residents of the United States live in a country which grows demographically more varied year by year, and whose population was approximately 51% female as of 2012¹. Although women and people of color in the USA are gradually surmounting the barriers that prevent or discourage their full participation in "non-traditional" fields, it is

widely acknowledged that there are still obstacles to be overcome. As a student and a teacher, I have noticed that both the diversity and the obstacles are echoed in interesting ways in stage combat classrooms.

The USA's national gender balances have been reflected in most of the introductory SAFD stage combat classes I've taken or taught in the past 14 years: more women than men, or equal numbers of women and men, enroll in and complete introductory stage combat courses. However, as the content of SAFD stage combat classes gets more "advanced," the classroom enrollment numbers tend to shift away from these norms and toward a greater proportion of men than women.

This attrition of women from the ranks of experienced stage combatants is progressively more striking in the ranks of SAFD Certified Teachers, Fight Directors, and Fight Masters. As of 2013, approximately 15% (19 of 133) of SAFD Certified Teachers; approximately 9.5% (4 of 42) of SAFD Fight Directors; and approximately 6% (1 of 16) of non-Emeritus SAFD Fight Masters were women.²

The noticeable decline in women's participation at each rung of the SAFD ladder is comparable to similar drop-offs in other stereotypically "non-traditional" careers for women, such as the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics). Practitioners in these fields are engaged in extensive discussion about causes and remedies for women's under-representation, with the goal of recruiting and retaining talented women and people of color. Because of the similar "majority male" environment and similar attrition rates for women, the SAFD can learn a lot from the STEM fields about creating and implementing inclusionary practices for the long-term benefit of our profession.

In sum, as the demographic of the current and the next generation of theatre and stage

"They Shall Not Perish," Douglas Volk (1856-1935). Propaganda poster published on behalf of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East by American Lithographic Co., New York, 1918. A print of this poster is in the Prints and Photographs Division of the United States Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA.



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combat students changes to reflect the changing face of the USA — with ever-growing percentages of women and people of color — I believe it is crucial for the long-term viability of the SAFD that our community be successful at welcoming and retaining increasing numbers of women and people of color among all levels of our membership.

Strategy and Tactics

With these circumstances in mind, I therefore ask myself the following question. As a teacher dedicated to the history, practice, and promotion of the craft of stage combat, and as a professional educator who comprehends the great value of a demographically diverse and inclusive community, what can I do to welcome, encourage, and retain a population of students and colleagues that accurately reflects our non-homogeneous world and workplace, and increases the health and sustainability of our profession?

There are numerous well-researched and effective methods and practices for making work and classroom environments more hospitable for all participants. Dr. Claude M. Steele, the award-winning author of *Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*³, has collected decades' worth of data on majority and minority population groups. Dr. Steele and his colleagues established the terms "identity contingency" and its sub-category of "stereotype threat" to describe the complex, pervasive, interwoven aspects of an environment which collectively serve to discourage the members of a minority group from participation and success in that environment. In the opening pages of *Whistling Vivaldi*, Dr. Steele describes "stereotype threat" as follows:

"...as members of society we have a pretty good idea of what other members of our society think about lots of things, including the major groups and identities in society. We could all take out a piece of paper, write down the major stereotypes of these identities, and show a high degree of agreement in what we wrote. This means that whenever we're in a situation where a bad stereotype about one of our own identities could be applied to us—such as those about being old, poor, rich, or female—we know it. We know what 'people could think.' We know that anything we do that fits the stereotype could be taken as confirming it. And we know that, for that reason, we could be judged and treated accordingly."⁴

Stereotype threat, resulting in poor performance and/or attrition, is measurable and quantifiable; and research indicates that its discouraging effect is often greatest on the most talented and motivated members of the minority groups affected.

One of the most successful countermeasures against stereotype threat in the classroom is to ensure that members of under-represented groups see themselves represented in teaching materials. This is a method with great potential for widespread implementation by teachers in the SAFD. We can use the SAFD's own long-standing emphasis on the history of combat to highlight examples in the historical record that broaden the choices of role models and exemplars. We can also bring a wider range of images of combatants into the foreground of our attention, onto the walls of our classrooms, and into our websites and advertising materials; so that as students and



practitioners, we become more expansive and imaginative in our work as actors, partners, instructors, and movement artists.

In this essay I shall describe how I have combined historical visual approaches in my search for evocative, inspirational images to share with my students. First, I will provide a brief synopsis of World War I and the origins of propaganda imagery. Then I will focus on a few of the numerous World War I propaganda posters which used images of sword-wielding women as emblems of country, patriotism, martial endeavor, and victorious strength.

World War I: Cataclysmic Change

In the late summer of 1914, World War I — "The Great War" or "The War to End All Wars" — embroiled the major European countries and their colonies in what would become a 5-year cataclysm of violence. Millions of soldiers, many of them volunteers, died on each side of the conflict, often in military engagements of horrendous bloodshed and futility.

"Sottoscrivete al Prestito [Subscribe to the Loan]," Giovanni Capranesi (1852-1925). Propaganda poster published by the Bergamo Istituto Italiano D'Arti Grafiche, Bergamo, Italy, 1917. A print of this poster is in the Prints and Photographs Division of the United States Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA.

The nations engaged in WWI employed new weapons: tanks, flame-throwers, aircraft, poison gas, submarines, long-range artillery — and one very old weapon: political propaganda. The Great War, grinding onward seemingly without end, destroyed battalion after battalion of soldiers. For countries with volunteer armed forces, enlistment propaganda was essential to recruitment and re-enlistment efforts. For nations which relied on conscription, propaganda bolstered morale amongst those who were drafted to fight. And wartime governments used propaganda to raise money from the civilian population for the staggering costs of warfare.⁵

As patriotic and eager to join the war effort as their countrymen, thousands of women of all nationalities arrived in the theatre of war and devoted their energies, their skills, and sometimes their lives to the war effort.⁶ Many of them credited the courage and determination which prompted their war service to their prior involvement in campaigns for women's rights, workers' rights, immigrants' rights, and civil rights.

War Propaganda

World War I media images both reflected and encouraged the active participation of women in contemporary society and in the war effort. In an era before widespread adoption of radio, television, telephone, or more modern forms of mass communication, the print media were foremost in delivering news and information to large groups of people. Propaganda posters utilized vivid, emotionally compelling images and text to sway opinions, inflame passions, and influence citizens to act in their governments' interest.⁷

The illustrations used for the propaganda posters were solicited and produced by some of the most skilled artists of the day, ranging in the United States from Charles Dana Gibson (creator of the "Gibson Girl" model of American womanhood) to the anonymous students in a Commercial Art class at the Maryland Institute for the Promotion of the Mechanic Arts. Their messages targeted potential servicemen, housewives, laborers, church congregations, and children, and charged them with their duty to participate in their country's quest for victory, whether on the home front or on the battlefield.

Spirit of the Nation

Among the most striking forms of WWI propaganda were images of women in classical or historical attire, often wearing armor, and carrying broadswords and/or shields (and occasionally other weapons). These sword-wielding women represented the "spirit" of a nation, using the image of a female character who was traditionally associated with that country. The character's name was often a Latinized version of the nation's name, thus conveying the additional status of "historical" or "classical" authority. Familiar national symbols were Britannia for Great Britain; Germania for Germany; Italia Turrata for Italy; Helvetia for the *Confederatio Helvetica* of Switzerland; Marianne and La Marseillaise for France; Columbia and Lady Liberty for the United States. Sword-wielding figures of "Winged Victory" (the Greek goddess Nike) also appeared in the WWI propaganda posters of many countries.

In countries which prided themselves on their historical or folkloric connections to ancient Rome and Greece, these national personifications were habitually shown wearing Greco-Roman attire and martial accoutrements, along with animals or artifacts symbolic of their country. In Germany, which traced its cultural lineage to the northern regions of the European continent, the female spirits of the nation wore Nordic garb decorated with Germanic symbols, and carried weaponry of medieval Central and Northern Europe.

Common to all these depictions are the strength and vitality of the women warriors, whether they are attacking the foe or defending their native country and its soldiers and citizens. They are usually depicted as muscular, realistically posed, and non-sexualized. Furthermore, they are depicted as adult women, mature enough to be believable as "mothers of their country"). They complement — and are sometimes portrayed alongside — other WWI propaganda images of women as hard-working farmers and factory workers on the "home front", or strong white-clad nurses lifting wounded soldiers from the trenches on the battlefield.

Out of the 50 or more images of women warriors I've found so far in WWI propaganda archives, here are a few of my favorites for use in the stage combat classroom.

Éowyn!

J.R.R. Tolkien, who served in the British Army during WWI, might have seen a forerunner of his character Éowyn in this postcard image of Germania⁸, in martial garb from her steel corselet to her armored feet, bearing a shield and broadsword, and braced to fight for her homeland. The caption reads, "*Von allen Seiten stürmten sie an, Vom Haß verblindet und blindem Wahn Und wollten die Deutschen vernichten*" ("From all sides they stormed in, Blinded by hatred and blind madness And wanted to destroy the Germans").

Propagandists make extensive use of "origin" imagery to boost patriotic fervor among their country's citizens. Germania typically wears a long dress of medieval European cut, long fair hair in braids or unbound tresses, and either a laurel wreath or — as in this case — the tiered crown designed by the 19th-century German Kaisers to resemble the Imperial Crown of the *Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher*



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Nation, the Holy Roman Empire (which, as Voltaire famously remarked, was “neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire”⁹). Her shield is usually oblong, rather than round, and her feet are usually shod rather than sandaled. The black *Reichsadler* [“Empire’s eagle”] and the Prussian *Eisernes Kreuz*, or Iron Cross, are often featured prominently on her clothing and military gear.

What I like most about this image for the classroom is Germania’s self-presentation as a strong woman: feet planted securely, her shield in a defensive position, and her broadsword held one-handed in a low guard. Undaunted by fires in the background or her windblown hair and clothing, she is ready to attack or defend. This is a great image to inspire confidence in young women encountering broadsword (or broadsword and shield) for the first time — and a great image for all students, male and female, as it normalizes the concept of women as strong fighters.

Mother Bear!

The United States traces its political origins to the classical Greek democracies and the Roman republic. The American WWI images of Columbia and Lady Liberty show them dressed in sandals and classical *chiton* or *stola*, combined with Greek and/or Roman military

kit. In homage to the assistance of France in the American Revolutionary War, and in a nod to the subsequent French Revolution (a regime change which was endorsed by some of America’s most notable founders and political philosophers), Columbia and Lady Liberty often wear the “liberty cap.” Based on the “Phrygian cap” worn as a symbol of democratic rule in ancient Greece, the red liberty cap (*le bonnet de la Liberté*, or simply *le bonnet rouge*) was adopted by French citizens during their violent overthrow of tyranny in the late 1700s and was frequently worn by Marianne, the bare-breasted national personification of the French Republic, in the French propaganda posters of WWI.

Many WWI propaganda images show sword-wielding women guarding combatants or leading troops in battle. Others connect the traditional role of woman as a protector of the defenseless with the image of women wielding swords. In this U.S. poster¹⁰, Columbia, her hair in a classical knot at the base of her neck, is dressed in a *stola* and wears a liberty cap of stars-and-stripes fabric. She has raised her broadsword to protect a clinging, terrified, dark-haired female child representing the uncounted thousands of young children orphaned or made homeless and destitute in the countries comprising the Middle Eastern theatre of World War I. Columbia’s shield is suspended above her, and an American flag swirls protectively about her body and that of the child she defends.

Again, this is a useful classroom image for its matter-of-fact depiction of a strong, muscular woman who is attractive but not sexualized, and who is willing to fight. This woman, although she is powerful and athletic enough to hold her sword above her head, ready to strike, she is more conventionally “feminine” in appearance than Germania — thus offering another possible template for a fierce female combatant, in addition to the template of a pugnacious tomboy. I also

“Deutschland 1914 [Germany 1914],” Friedrich (Fritz) August von Kaulbach (1850–1920). Propaganda postcard published by O.G. Zehrfeld, Leipzig, Germany, Aug. 1914. The original painting is in the collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Germany, as of 2012.

see value in providing an image of a woman protecting children, for those students (male or female) who need a “way in” to imagine a situation in which they could commit an act of violence.

Italia Victrix!

I chose this Italian image¹¹ for my third example because I like its sense of humor. Italia Turrita — named for her headgear, which mimics a walled city — sports a crenellated, belligerently-tilted crown bedecked with a sprig of victory laurel, with an Italian flag draped toga-style behind her. Her embossed shield slung at her back, wearing Roman-style body armor and an embroidered *stola*, she points her *gladius* at the heart of a caricatured German warrior

in symbolic defense of her native land. Italia is a force to be reckoned with: she has evidently scared the weapon right out of the fist of her Hunnish opponent. Her “barbarian Northerner” antagonist has not only dropped his spiked cudgel in dismay at being confronted by her; he appears to be setting his own beard on fire in his fluster and alarm. Even his eagle-winged helmet, symbolizing the German Empire, looks as if it wants to take flight and escape. The value of this image in the classroom is to remind students that women as well as men can be ferocious and funny combatants.

The Value of These Images

These vibrant, colorful images from WWI have a historical and sociological value well worth rediscovering. The century-old First World War has tended to be overshadowed — particularly in the USA, which entered the war quite late in the timeline — by the more recent episode of World War II, with its exciting and easily-simplified “heroes versus Nazis” narrative. Along with many other WWI details, the presence of sword-wielding women in WWI propaganda images has been lost to popular memory over time, and these images have rested in obscurity in archives at the United States Library of Congress, the Universität Osnabrück in Germany, the Imperial War Museum collections in Great Britain, and other such repositories.

Collectively, these propaganda posters featuring swordswomen and shieldmaidens build a picture of “women’s place” in the early 1900s which is strikingly different from our casual contemporary assumptions that women of that time conformed to the Victorian-era stereotype of the sweet, submissive, self-effacing “angels in the house.” To the contrary, World War I occurred against a backdrop of decades-long, sometimes centuries-long campaigns for women’s suffrage, abolition of slavery, labor rights, and immigrants’ rights. Women in many countries, of all ages and economic/social classes, played central roles in the hard-fought, often discouraging battles which eventually made possible the rights their descendants now enjoy. Perhaps to fight on a literal battlefield seemed less unthinkable after fighting on the political and cultural front.

These historic images also provide a counter-balance to some of the more reductive current stereotypes regarding appropriate female behavior and appearance. In present-day Western society, images of women in mainstream popular culture and entertainment media are frequently infantilized, sexualized, and/or lacking agency. These WWI images depict adult women of strength and purpose, actively employing the weapons with which we in the SAFD teach and perform. Though the WWI images reflect attitudes and aesthetics of a bygone era, they are contemporary in their fighting spirit and muscular vigor.

Moreover, these images have value as part of the educational mission of the SAFD. In the classrooms where I have introduced such images, both male and female students have reacted positively to the greater range of possibilities shown therein. I have sometimes posted images online for students to view; but my favorite place to display them is on the door of the armory, so that the images are visible to every student at the beginning and end of each class session when they take out and return weapons. Seeing an array of combatant images which include women and people of color, like themselves and/or the classmates they see every day in class, diminishes stereotype threat by making a clear visual statement that everyone is welcome in the stage combat classroom. Students have responded with increased interest and motivation during class, and have taken this broadening of “acceptable” images to the next level, exploring unfamiliar weapon forms and requesting yet more images in which they see themselves represented. Their interest, in turn, has

challenged me to search more extensively in multiple media in order to deepen and broaden my own knowledge and ultimately share it with my colleagues.

These WWI propaganda images of sword-wielding women comprise another of the many useful gateways into the world of stage combat for contemporary students, providing a historical and artistic context for both men and women to envision female fighters competently and matter-of-factly taking up weapons which are often tacitly coded as “primarily for men.” Broadening our range of imaginable images enriches our work, deepens the wellsprings of our creativity, and benefits us all.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Department of Commerce: United States Census Bureau. Female persons, percent, 2012: 50.8%.
- 2 In the case of Non-White SAFD members, the attrition rates follow a similar and arguably a more pronounced progression. However, that is a topic which deserves its own series of in-depth essays and recommendations, and is not addressed in this article other than to note the existence and importance of this same pattern as it applies to persons of color in the SAFD.
- 3 Steele, 1-15.
- 4 Steele, 5.
- 5 “Raymond Prince Montecuccoli, an Austrian generalissimo of the war-torn seventeenth century, is reported to have remarked that three things are essential for warfare: first, money; second, money; and, third, money.” Wolf, 363.
- 6 Schneider, 1-24.
- 7 Rawls, 1-20, 149-153.
- 8 Propaganda postcard published by O.G. Zehrfeld, Leipzig, Germany, Aug. 1914. Title: “Deutschland 1914 [Germany 1914]”. Artist: Friedrich (Fritz) August von Kaulbach (1850-1920). The original painting is in the collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Germany, as of 2012. See also Historische Bildpostkarten: Universität Osnabrück, Sammlung Prof. Dr. S. Giesbrecht. Der Erste Weltkrieg auf der Bildpostkarte: Kriegspropaganda.
- 9 Bartlett, 343.
- 10 Propaganda poster published on behalf of the American Committee for Relief in the Near East, by American Lithographic Co., New York, USA, 1918. Title: “They Shall Not Perish”. Artist: Douglas Volk (1856-1935). A print of this poster is in the Prints and Photographs Division of the United States Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA.
- 11 Propaganda poster published by the Bergamo Istituto Italiano D’Arti Grafiche, Bergamo, Italy, 1917. Title: “Sottoscrivete al Prestito [Subscribe to the Loan]”. Artist: Giovanni Capranesi (1852- 1925). A print of this poster is in the Prints and Photographs Division of the United States Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA.

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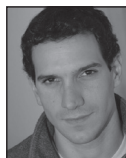
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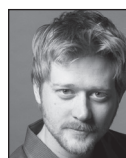
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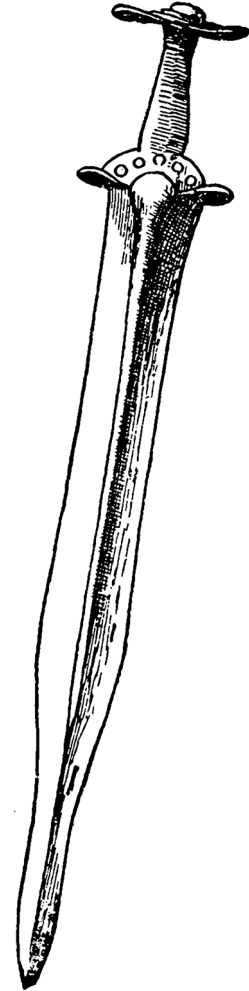
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The Society of American Fight Directors is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting safety and fostering excellence in the art of stage combat. The SAFD is committed to providing the highest level of service through initiating and maintaining guidelines and standards of quality, providing education and training, promoting scholarly research, as well as encouraging communication and collaboration throughout the entertainment industry.

Whether you are a producer, director, actor or teacher, we can help accelerate your stage combat skills. SAFD members gain access to a world class networking organization, high caliber stage combat training and mentorship designed to expand your career. Our members include professional actors, directors, producers, educators, dancers, singers, stunt performers, historians, scholars and armorers working in theatre, film, television, all levels of academia, stunt shows, opera and the video gaming industry.

The SAFD Recognized Membership Levels

Friend

One need not be a stage fighter, teacher, or choreographer to join and be active in the SAFD. Any individual who has an interest in the stage combative arts who wants to keep abreast of the field and receive all the benefits of memberships may join as a friend.

Certified Teacher

Any individual who has successfully completed the SAFD Teacher Certification Workshop. These individuals are endorsed by the Society to teach staged combat and may teach the SAFD Skills Proficiency Test.

Actor Combatant

Any individual who has passed an SAFD Skills Proficiency Test and is current in Unarmed, Rapier & Dagger (or Single Sword), and another discipline. The SAFD considers Actor/Combatants to be proficient in performing staged combat safely and effectively.

Fight Director

Any individual who has held the status of Certified Teacher of the SAFD for a minimum of three years and has demonstrated through work in the professional arena a high level of expertise as a teacher and choreographer of staged combat. These individuals are endorsed by the Society to direct and/or choreograph incidents of physical violence.

Advanced Actor Combatant

Any individual who is current in six of eight SAFD disciplines, of which at least three (3) must be recommended passes and is a member in good standing. The SAFD acknowledges Advanced Actor Combatants as highly skilled performers of staged fighting.

Fight Master

Individuals who have successfully fulfilled the requirements of Fight Master as established and published by the Governing Body and awarded recognition by the current body of Fight Masters (College of Fight Masters). Individuals must be members in good standing and engage in continued active service to the Society.

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How much does it cost?

If you have *never* been a member of the SAFD, you can join for just \$30.00 for your first year of membership.

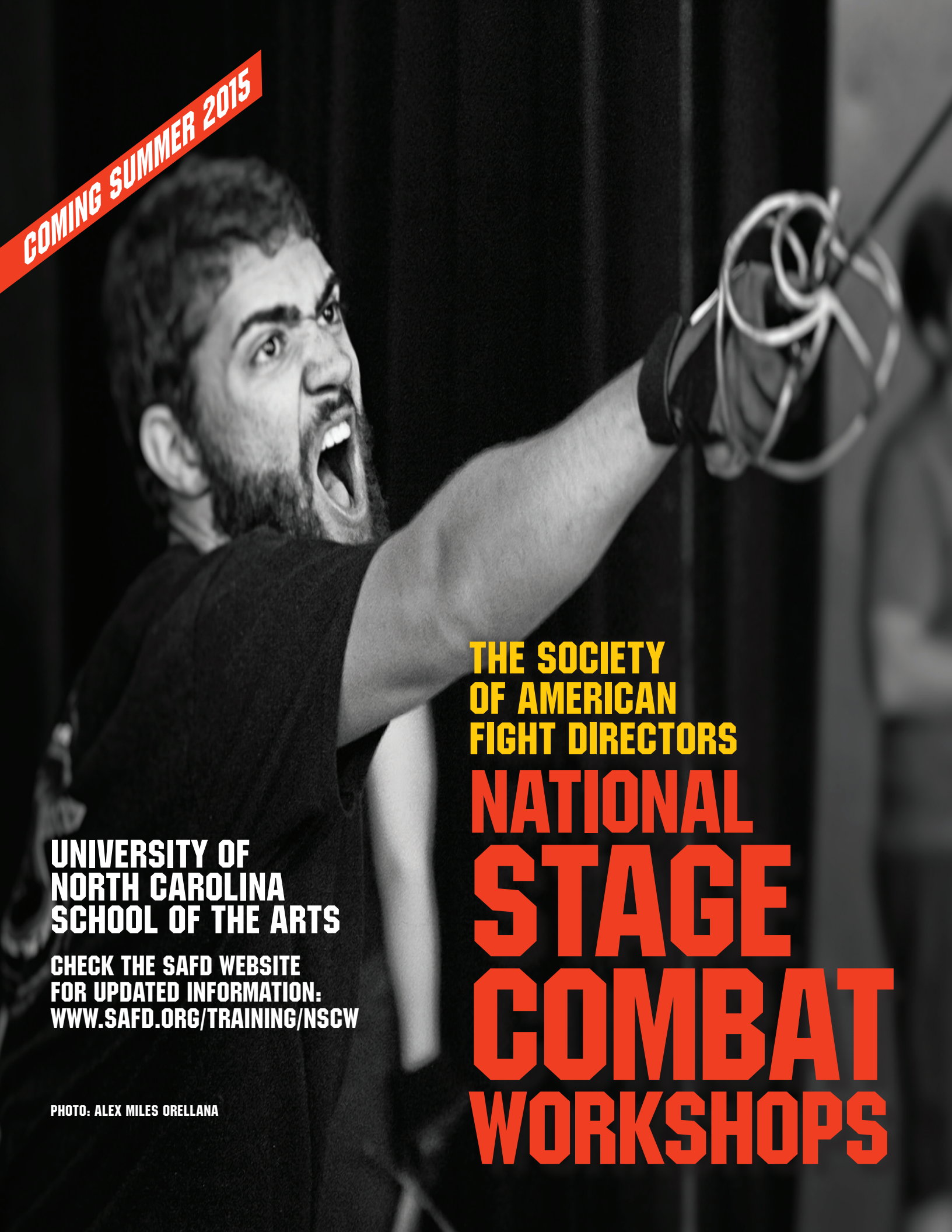
If you are a current or previous member of the SAFD, renewing costs as little as \$45.00 per year.

Ready to join or renew?

You will need to login or set up an account at through the SAFD website (www.safd.org). From there you will be guided through the membership payment process.

Thank you for supporting The Society of American Fight Directors.





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**CHECK THE SAFD WEBSITE
FOR UPDATED INFORMATION:
WWW.SAFD.ORG/TRAINING/NSCW**

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**THE SOCIETY
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