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The Society of American Fight Directors

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The FightMaster

Spring 2015 The Journal of the Society of American Fight Directors

Why Teach Historical Accuracy?

Fight Theatre

What are the boundaries of audience participation and environment interaction?

Performing Art to Martial Arts

Justin Krall on how training at a Shaolin School in China improved his understanding of stage combat movement

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Red Tooth and Claw

Replace hands with talons and swords with bat'leHs, and what is an actor to do?

Emeritus Unlimited

What does a life in stage combat look like?





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In his continuing series, **Joseph Travers** takes a look at the titles available to fight choreographers, asking all the while: Is this the best way to define the work we do?



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Editorially Speaking



I was a fortune-teller for a season, and even with the skills I mastered reading palms and cards, I find I am ill equipped to tell the future. As I write this, it's the holidays, and the winter workshops have commenced. Yet when you get this edition of *The Fight Master*, it will be spring. The ground will have started thawing, and the heartiest flowers will start pushing through the frost. The winter workshops will be but pleasant Facebook photo albums, and the spring workshops will take center stage. What could the interim future hold? The sense of promise and possibility is what makes the New Year such a fascinating time for me. In terms of *The Fight Master*, a new year is a chance to explore new perspectives and check in with the craft outside the classroom.

It was in reaching out that I found a theme for this issue: exploration. I was curious about the ways our community pushes the boundaries of our craft. Considering how the SAFD has grown and evolved – in membership, in weapon styles, in influences – it becomes clear that ours is not a stagnant field. Choreographers and combatants are always exploring new ways to bring dynamic action to the stage. The articles and editorials in the following pages seek to do the same – from going back in time, to around the world, to the frontiers of the imagination, each is grappling with how to move us forward. I hope they get you asking questions about where you can go. I hope they get you arguing over what works and what does not. I hope they inspire you to take your work as far as you can.

Rather than wax philosophical on the passage of time (I lack both the space and eloquence), I will simply wish that at the time of reading this – and it does not matter what time that is – you find satisfaction in your work, contentment in your life, and success in your fights.

Be well and fight well!

Jean A. Monfort, Editor
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Addendum: At the time this issue goes to the printer, the SAFD governing body will have announced the new Regional Representatives. The printed Directory will be updated in the Fall Issue. In the meantime, it is my pleasure to list our new Regional Representatives here:

East Central: Alicia Rodis
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Northeast: John Cashman
Northwest: Candace Dahne
Pacific West: Collin Bressie
Rocky Mountain: Kevin Inouye
Southeast: David Sterritt
Southwest: Adam Noble
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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
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- Submissions must include any and all necessary supporting documentation (bibliographies, etc.)
- 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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Bob Borwick is a Certified Teacher with the SAFD. He received his BFA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Bob is a graduate of the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre in Blue Lake, CA. He has taught and choreographed for many theaters in the San Francisco and Seattle areas. He is currently teaches stage combat and other movement styles at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, TN, where he lives with his wife and three daughters.



Justin Mitchell Krall is a freelance fight director and performer with a heavy concentration on physical arts. He holds a BFA from Niagara University where he studied stage combat extensively and has continued to do so post grad. He also holds a black sash in Liu Seong Kuntao-Silat. In 2013, Justin travelled to China to study Shaolin Kung Fu at the Maling Shaolin Kung Fu Academy where he trained under Shaolin Masters for a year.



Jean Monfort (SAFD Actor Combatant) is a Chicago area actress, with an MA from the University of Chicago. She also serves as the Acting Coach and Volunteer Coordinator for True Dungeon, Ltd. based in central Illinois. She also works as an ESL and Etiquette teacher in Wenjiang, China, and dabbles in editing.



José Pérez IV is a Fight Choreographer and Teaching Artist who specializes in creating sitespecific stage combat spectacles. He is an Actor Combatant and has been training with the SAFD since 2006. BFA in Drama from NYU Tisch Experimental Theatre Wing. Currently pursuing an MFA in Performance Pedagogy at the University of Pittsburgh with a focus in teaching physical based acting and creating original work.



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. He received his Actor Combatant status at the National SCW in 2008, and became an Advanced Actor Combatant in February of 2010. He is currently proficient in all eight weapon disciplines, with Recommended status in five of them and has choreographed over 20 productions. He holds a BA in Interdisciplinary Fine Art from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and an MA in Theatre Performance from Eastern Michigan University. He also holds a Level 1 Professor Certificate in the Margolis Method of actor training.



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.

On The Cover



Regent University's fall 2014 production of *Macbeth*, featuring MFA Acting students Brad Brinkley (*Macbeth*, L) and Natalie Roy (*Macdonwald*, R). The weird sisters (Elizabeth Lambert, Marcy Griesbach, and Stephanie Bishop) are featured in the background.
Photo by David Polston

Why Bother *with* Historical Accuracy?

by Steven Schwall, AAC

IN THE LAST EDITION of *The Fight Master*, I offered up an article about the approach to adapting historic weapon techniques to the stage. Mostly, the article consisted of outlining the pitfalls and dangers in such adaptations, due to the lethal nature of the original techniques if done accurately. In reflecting on that article, I found it begged the question, “So why bother studying and adapting historic technique in the first place?”

The question is not without merit. The SAFD has developed a system of lines of attack, parries of several types, blade-on-blade work, wounds, and kills that would allow a fight arranger to choreograph a fight which fulfills both the dramatic and storytelling demands of any script. I know, because I’ve done it. The system is adaptable to any weapon, from the longsword to the smallsword. It is concise, well organized, and easy to teach, even to actors with no previous martial training. So why spend the time and effort to learn historic combat systems and adapt them into our projects?

The first is that our audiences tend to be smarter. Even if they are not students of any historic or cultural martial arts systems, they can tell the difference between simple and complex choreography, and the deluge of more complex fighting systems in the movies has raised the level of expectation. There is also more widespread access to historically accurate fighting systems via the internet, so the simple “five lines” often do not satisfy. There are also more students of historic and cultural martial systems today than ever before, and they are demanding to see their systems more accurately depicted on stage and screen.

But beyond the simple fact that we need to keep pleasing our audiences is the fact that we fight arrangers and choreographers are artists, just as our other movement colleagues are in dance and sports. As artists, we need to keep finding new ways to express physical violence, to keep pushing the envelope, to keep expanding our own horizons. That is how we, as artists, grow.

There are several ways in which the study of new martial systems can benefit our growth as artists, as well as continuing to please our audiences, a few of which I will highlight now.

Style

EACH MARTIAL SYSTEM comes from a specific time and place, and is the natural outgrowth of the influences of fashion, movement style (often called “grace”) and socio-economic status. The weapons of each style also have specific design features, which determine how they are wielded. Designing fights within these systems creates unique movement situations, as well as unique visual effects.

Another aspect of style lies in these various systems’ abilities to dispel stereotype. The longsword, for instance, is commonly perceived as a heavy weapon, capable only of large swings and crushing attacks. Study of the various Renaissance manuals which deal with



Figure 1: A halfsword grapple from the “Gladiatoria” fechtbuch, 15th century.

the weapon reveals a complex system of maneuvers and counters. The German systems in particular depend largely on the concept of “*fühlen*,” or “feeling.” One’s counter to an attack depends as much on the ability to “feel” the oppo-

nent’s intention and use it to advantage, much like modern Judo systems. The result is far from two people bashing at each other with large steel clubs, it becomes more like a complex dance of giving and taking, and attempting to maneuver to a point of advantage.

The use of historic technique also offers stylistic positions which are not the “usual.” There is a scene in the film *Kingdom of Heaven*, an instructional sequence where Balin’s father (Liam Neeson) was teaching Balin (Orlando Bloom) to use a sword. That whole sequence was based on Fiore de Liberi’s manuals. While the historic purists might say that the characters were living over 200 years before Fiore’s time, the sequence gave more of an historic flavor to the film, as well as giving the audiences something they had not commonly seen before. Further, its use was very well received by the historic martial arts community.

Variety

THE VARIOUS MARTIAL SYSTEMS have vastly different lines of attack, as well as differing philosophies of how the systems should be employed. These can allow different body types to execute fighting maneuvers, creating more variety in character choices within the fight depending on how each character would employ the system in which he is framed. It can also make for interesting cross-cultural combinations, which create even more visual and emotional variety as differing systems meet. The final duel in *Rob Roy* comes to mind

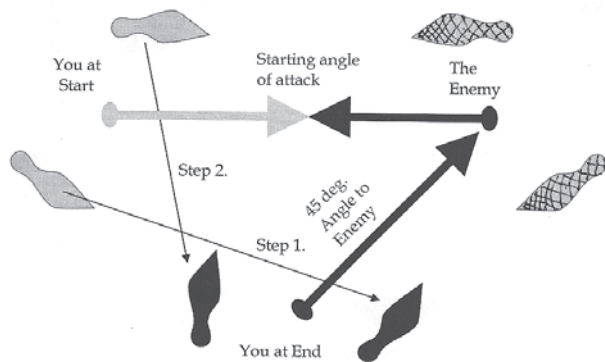


Figure 2: Diagram of a Slope Step by Hugh T. Knight in *The Knightly Art of the Longsword*, 2009.

create more interesting visual pictures, but it can also make staging easier in a multitude of performance spaces. Non-linear patterns adapt themselves much better to staging fights in thrust or arena type spaces. This is satisfying to audiences, because they can get a look at both characters in the conflict with-

out the need for overly complex (and sometimes awkward) changes of line, or the employment of movement that does not make kines-
thetic or martial sense. As I said before, our audiences are smarter, and even if they are not martial artists, they can tell when something is forced or does not ring true with what they have seen up to that point. Another advantage to using historic technique is that larger weapons may still be employed in limited spaces. The manuals are full of false edge attacks and strike positions where the hands are not fully extended forward (see fig.3). By using historic technique, one can stage a broadsword fight inside an eight-foot diameter circle, or an eight-foot square. This can come in handy when staging battle scenes in small intimate theaters, or allow larger stages to handle even more combatants, creating a larger spectacle.

This is only a generalized outline of the different ways in which designers of violence might use historic technique to enhance a production. As always, care must be taken that the techniques are understood fully, and then their inherent capability to injure examined, to create safe solutions before they are employed. But the employment of these techniques can create interesting new dynamics in which the characters can exist, lend a historic flavor to the production, allow for more flexibility in smaller spaces, and when carefully used, can enhance their presentation. ✚

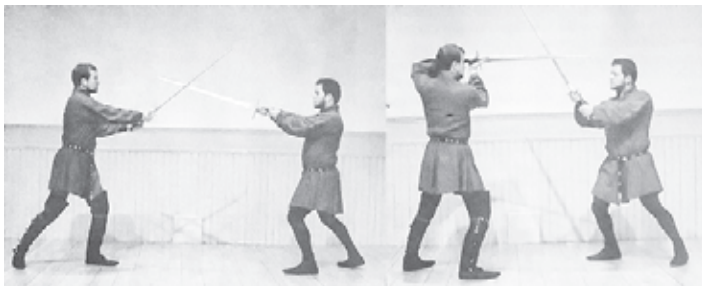


Figure 3: On the left you may see what is commonly used as Broadsword measure. The arms are extended, and the combatants are still at a safe distance. On the right, the combatant on the left executes a false edge attack with the hands back. Note that his measure is closer, but yet his blade is safely away from his partner. Photos from *Fighting with the German Longsword*, by Christian Henry Tobler, 2004.

as an example of two differing weapons systems meeting. The two fighting styles physicalized the character differences between Liam Neeson's Rob Roy and Tim Roth's Cunningham. Even where the systems are matched, variety

can be employed in stylistic choices as addressed above. For instance, a more brutish or blindly aggressive character might employ a heavier, bashing style, where his smaller but more skilled opponent might counter strength with weakness, evading and redirecting rather than meeting force with static force.

In addition, many of the historic martial systems have techniques that employ the weapons in alternate ways. Half-sword techniques with the longsword change the effective distance between combatants, which can serve to bring the conflict into close range and heighten tension (see fig. 1). Weapons can be used as levers to manipulate both other weapons and other bodies, which serve to create more and different movement patterns and "pictures" for our audiences to experience. Referring again to the sequence in "Kingdom of Heaven," Liam Neeson received an attack, levered it (and Balin) into a vulnerable position, and presented the heavy pommel, saying, "There's more to the sword than the blade."

Adaptability

MANY OF THE DIFFERENT martial systems employ differing patterns of movement through space. Many of the historic longsword manuals employ what is commonly translated as a "slope step." This is a footwork movement designed to take a combatant off the centerline, either to avoid an attack or to create an opening. This differs from what the SAFD calls an "avoidance," or a thwart front right in Star footwork, as there is no recovery back to the starting position, but rather a transfer to a new line and stance (see fig. 2). Not only can this

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FIGHT THE

Experiments in Site-Specific Fights



by José Pérez IV

A

KATANA WIELDING CROSS-DRESSER slams into the side of the car, face (and makeup) smeared across the window as the two audience members squeal with joy and shock in the backseat. A kick-your-teeth-in soundtrack pumps out of the speakers, combat sound effects timed perfectly to the fight choreography exploding all around, against, and sometimes even inside the car. As I write this, my show, *The Ride-Along: An Immersive Theatre Adventure for Two*, is running at the 2014 Orlando International Fringe Theatre Festival in sunny Florida. It's a show in a car - we place audiences of two in the backseat of a real car, and drive around Orlando for a night of fights, songs, and a theatrical experience the audience isn't likely to forget.

What is Fight Theatre?

The Ride-Along is part of a string of endeavors I have dubbed "Fight Theatre," which I define as original, unique theatre experiences that feature stage combat as their primary medium of performance (in the way dance theatre features dance, opera features singing, etc).

JOSÉ PÉREZ IV

ATRE

and Audience-Combatants



OPPOSITE: from L to R, Taylor Frost as Agent Lopez, Manuel Graves as The Kid, Tim Smolinski as Billy. “*The Ride-Along: An Immersive Theatre Adventure for Two*”. Written, Fight Direction+Direction by José Pérez IV. A Fight Theatre Production. 2014.

TOP: From L to R, Virgil Rodriguez as Big Al, José Pérez IV as Agent Lopez, Clare Ghezzi as Agent D. “*The Ride-Along: An Immersive Theatre Adventure for Two*”.

BOTTOM: From L to R, Audience-Combatant, Madeline Lewis as Thug#1, Melanie Glickman as Thug#2, Jessica G. Smith as Agent Thomson. “*Street Mystery: An Audience-of-One Experience*”.

I’ve created shows that involved the audience as combatants, that provide a personal MP3 file to experience the fights, and a show that featured a knife fight in a literal bedroom.

I started making this kind of theatre work for a couple of reasons. First, after training with FM J. David “El Presidente” Brimmer at New York University and the other incredible teachers New York City has to offer, I discovered that while I had a pretty fair aptitude

for stage combat, it seemed like my skills would rarely be utilized to their full extent by my theater community at that time. I wanted to be in *fight shows*; not a Shakespeare play with a couple of scattered fights. I wanted to test my limits, to learn grueling combat phrases, be required to do strength and stamina training for a project. I wanted the majority of my time on stage to be fighting, not speaking. It seemed odd to me that so much time and training was put into stage combat for many actors and yet there wasn’t any standard live performance forms that truly embraced and showcased that skill in the way that singing or dancing is showcased regularly.

So I began creating my own Fight Theatre projects to explore this mode of performance and the challenges it might present for the performers and audience. Taking theater off the stage and into the field – making it site-specific – stemmed from both the creative desire to find a new “where” and “how” for performances, and the financial reality of stage and studio rental rates in New York City. I was fresh out of college, and looking for something new, so I created what I was looking for in Fight Theatre.

The Ride-Along: An Immersive Theatre Adventure for Two

AS MY INTEREST FOR site-specific work grew I felt a strong desire to leave New York City and explore how my Fight Theatre endeavors might operate outside of a metropolis. My travels took me to Orlando where I put up *The Ride-Along* at the Orlando International Fringe Theater Festival. We sold out every show after a couple of nights and had some grand reviews - towards the end of our run we were adding in an extra audience member for “Squeeze Shows,” which had the extra benefit of adding extra energy to the car. Audience members ranged from a 10 year old child to individuals well into their 60’s. When we started, I had no idea how the show was going to be received by the Orlando community. I half expected no one to buy tickets, that a show in a car would be a bit too strange, too scary. I was happy to be so wrong. Patrons bounced with excitement before their rides, large groups gathered to watch our first fight scene outside of the Lowndes Shakespeare Center, and the feedback was incredible. There was a clear thirst for this type of experience.

As a fight director, I have a few favorite things about this show. First, the theater (the car) moves, as in it moves about when bodies make forceful contact with it. When Manuel Graves (playing The Kid) slams me down on the hood or Tim Smolinski (playing Billy) smashes my head against the trunk, tremors go through the whole car. It shakes, it bounces, it rocks - the audience is receiving *direct physical feedback* from the performance. They receive a physical connection to the choreography, to the physical storytelling. I love this, I am obsessed with this and I think it is the coolest thing ever because it allows the audience to experience the show viscerally as well as visually.

Second, we bring fight choreography extremely close to the audience without putting them in danger. Fists fly and swords swing but the car serves as a protective cocoon with windows, allowing our audience to be a couple of feet away from the glory of a contact stomach punch, or to see minute expressions of fear, the sweat on our brows or our muscles straining in a corps-a-corps. The safety container of the car has allowed me the incredible opportunity to bring the audience “on-stage” with my fighters, to examine the equivalent of a close-up shot in film. In fact, the different shapes of the car and our careful blocking created a very cinematic show. I intentionally used the windows as “frames” for the action, the larger front windshield was best for wide-shots and phrases that really traveled while the smaller side windows were naturally suited for close-ups like a flurry of contact punches.

Part of my mission is to bring the extraordinary to the ordinary, to reframe places we might see everyday and infuse them with potential. Fights in *The Ride-Along* sought to match fantastical stories to unconventional, often mundane sites. For example, audiences witnessed a thug getting his face slapped repeatedly by windshield wipers in a local doctor’s parking lot. In front of the Shakespeare Center, an enormous bathrobe-wearing drug dealer is choked out by a rolled up car window, followed by two cross-dressers fighting the protagonist with katanas across the street from a Wendy’s, and finally participating in a Yell-Nice-Things-Drive-By mission for a depressed target walking down a nondescript stretch of sidewalk in downtown Orlando. The success for me comes when I catch audiences fresh off their ride excitedly swapping ideas of where else the show could have gone, the locations they thought they might see a scene take place, wondering aloud if the helicopter or ambulance or strangely dressed man we saw waiting for the bus were part of the show. They laughed with the strangers with whom they had shared *The Ride-Along*, confessing that they thought the other might have been a plant the whole time.

This radical expansion of the audience’s “what if?” muscle is what I’m aiming for with this site-specific Fight Theatre. What I want is for one of our audience members to drive by the Wendy’s lot the next morning and think to themselves, “Huh. Last night I saw two sword-wielding cross-dressers fight a secret agent with a mohawk in that lot... If it could happen there, where else could that kind of thing be happening?” I want to reignite imagination and adventure in the minds of my audience. I want them to think that a warrior’s epic quest, a duel with a demon, a time machine, or their very own great adventure could be just around the corner. Judging from the feedback we got from participants, I feel confident in the direction we’re going.

A great deal of the positive feedback centered on the sound design’s partnership with the fight choreography; audiences were astonished by our synchronicity with the fighting sound effects. We achieved this by rehearsing like demons. All movements were strictly choreographed to beats in the music, leaving no room for error on the performer’s part. An internalization of the music and sound effects was required, an instinctual focus that we cultivated in fight rehearsals by starting with tracks running at a very slow tempo then gradually working our way to full speed.

During the rehearsal process, we found that more anticipation is mandatory on the performer’s part to adhere to the standard Cue, Reaction, Action steps of fight choreography. Fighting to set beats



ABOVE: “The Battle of Taco Hill”. Written, Fight Direction + Direction by José Pérez IV. A Fight Theatre Production. 2013.

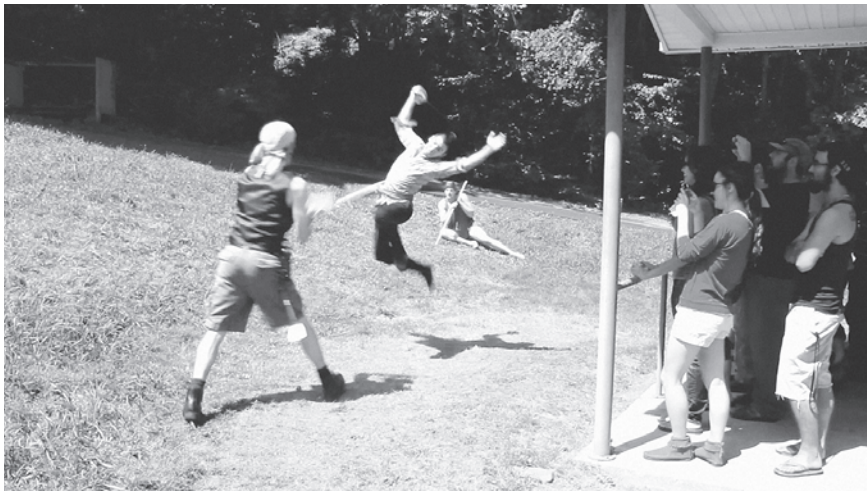
OPPOSITE: From L to R, Kemper McDowell as Boss Pancakes, José Pérez IV as The Wanderer, Alex Towers as Knife#2. “The Battle of Taco Hill”.

requires combatants not only to land a punch or complete a parry at the precise moment of the corresponding sound cue, but to also be making connection with a partner, showing the prep for an attack, allowing that partner to react, and then moving into the space of action they provide all *before* reaching the set beat they were working towards. Simply put, it takes an incredible amount of connection and critical timing to pull off this level of synchronization.

Additionally, by having the majority of our combat and vocal sounds covered in the show tracks we were freed from creating knaps ourselves. This allowed us to take on physical shapes and positions that would be difficult to present in a knapped performance, as we did not have to mask relative to audience location. Sound design allowed me to control the exact level of the impact sounds and the actor’s pre-recorded dialogue and pain/effort sounds in relation to the levels of the music. Another plus was that we were able to use plastic swords for the katana fight. Clever crafting and painting, paired with sounds of metal swords clashing enabled us to create a “real” sword effect while using plastic weapons. This was safer for our actors and also helped us avoid using metal swords in public, in the event we were approached by the police (which never happened).

Audience-Combatants

I REALIZE HOW DANGEROUS it is to mention that my shows contain some audience combat. In this community you can’t just say that kind of thing casually. Here’s how I approached one such encounter, in my show *Street Mystery*: towards the end of the show, each audience-of-one would find themselves by a large bike lockup (in the Greenwich Village area of Manhattan), confronted by a goofy, yet threatening thug intent on “punching on them.” The audience’s capable partner, Agent Thomson, would give them very specific instructions prior to the moment of “combat.” Prompts included: “Dodge to your left!” “Block your face with your left arm!” and “Push them with your right hand!” among other simple/achievable instructions. Their opponent would charge at them or throw punches with incredibly exaggerated preps and in slow-motion, giving the audience time to see the shape of the attack and adjust accordingly. In this comical style we always provided the audience with a sense



of success; effortlessly dodging tackles, tossing thugs with ease. The form was martially unrealistic but it served its purpose in my testing of this particular concept: can an untrained audience member safely participate in stage combat during a performance? In this most basic structure, the answer was yes.

There were many things in place to keep both the audience and our performers safe. We scrutinized choreography during rehearsals, and I played with all the ways the moves could go wrong and trained my team to keep everyone involved safe. We had concerns that audience members might not be able to control their limbs or that they might get overly aggressive. We checked these potential problems by keeping the choreography asked of the audience as simple as possible and by never placing the performers in positions they could not completely control themselves. All the actors were prepped on contingency plans for dangerous or uncooperative audience members, stopping the show if the audience proved to be dangerous in any way. By covering these scenarios in rehearsal we were able to finish our run with no injuries and lots of fun.

Next Steps

I THINK WHAT TITILLATES fight directors, choreographers, and performers in our community the most, what keeps us coming back, is the *problem solving* aspect of this craft - the detective work that goes into getting a single move to read, to researching the real way an obscure weapon would be used, to keeping the actors and audience safe in each moment. The puzzles we face in the rehearsal room are delicious and exhilarating. They're what keep us going to workshops, watching martial arts/action movies, and cross-training

in a variety of physical and theatrical practices. My expedition into audience-combatant shows is just another strain of puzzles to be tackled. After the success of *Street Mystery* I am now insatiable curious about sweatier, more physically involved ways to incorporate audience into performances. Naturally, my fight choreographer brain explodes with the multitude of ways that such a thing could go wrong, but it's the tantalizing "what if?" that keeps me thinking about it.

Always at the forefront is the primary question, "How can we do this safely?" And after being a part of this stage combat world, I've come to find that one *can't always be 100% safe*. There are no safety guarantees when two or more human beings swing limbs or weapons at one another, but it is our job to police these moments and put into effect certain rules and measures to ensure the safest experience possible. As I move forward with these shows my thinking is this: just because a theatrical scenario appears inherently dangerous at first look does not mean we should abandon the idea altogether; instead we should be spurred on by the complexity of a new puzzle to solve, and thus unravel it with creativity and guile.

Final Thoughts

I AM FASCINATED by stage combat as its own medium. I am fascinated by an audience's response to it. I am equally enthralled by performances happening outside of conventional theatre spaces, shedding the strict "theatre" and bleeding into words like "event" or "experience." For my part, I intentionally hijack the techniques of blockbuster movies, after-school anime, iPhone apps for instant gratification, all of what might be considered low-brow or overly prevalent in our popular media, because there is a level of *fun* in those things. They are just another form of spectacle, which I strongly believe in. I use stage combat, site specificity, and audience participatory performance in part because it is lots of fun, but also as another way to grab the audience's attention, to have them really listen.

I realize that I am flirting with some questionable realms. Safety, legality, and artistic integrity are on the line. While I try my utmost to be responsible for my actors and crew, I am also incredibly curious about the boundaries we set for ourselves. I will say again, just because a project seems iffy at face value I do not believe it should be abandoned. Sometimes when I pitch a new idea I will hear from other theatre artists, "This could be bad," but I like to respectfully counter, "This could be epic." ✦

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PERFORMING ART TO MARTIAL ARTS

BY JUSTIN MITCHELL KRALL

YEARS AGO, when I first took up stage combat, I told my professor that I wanted to pursue that aspect of theatre specifically as a career. He advised me to take up an actual martial art as background. I found a lesser-known system of kung fu right in my hometown-Liu Seong kun-tao-silat, or “Chinese Indonesian self defense.”

It was a hybrid system of different martial arts, and I loved it, but I wanted to go deeper than just studying a few hours a week. I found that opportunity in China, and as I had grown more interested in the Chinese culture in my training, I took a big step forward. In 2013 I flew to China to embark on the most intensive physical training in my life thus far. I was headed to Maling Shaolin Kung fu Academy, located in Jiangsu province, China, to study traditional shaolin kung fu under shaolin masters. (Recently I spoke with my professor on the phone “So... what are you doing Justin?” he asked, “Well you told me to take up a martial art so I moved to China for a year.” I replied smirking to myself).

Ever since I took up martial arts to compliment my stage combat training, I noticed the benefits far exceeded simply knowing a bit more about fighting technique and culture. I learned a lot more about subtle movements and principles of body mechanics. It wasn't limited to learning choreography, although we did memorize forms and patterns. It was also learning how to be present in a moment, to understand the application of technique may be different under different circumstances, that the memorized choreography isn't an absolute. In addition, we had many other classes, many which practice specific skills grounded in reflexive or instinctual movement and I wanted to immerse myself in those practices. Benefits aside, I had a primary objective: research for theatre, the same reason I took up martial arts in the America. I know a lot of people who are proficient at stage combat without a martial arts background. A colleague once said to me that they know enough to fake it on stage, to which I simply thought, “no one knows enough.” While a performer does not need to be a competitive fighter (I myself dislike fighting), nor be an advanced level martial artist, martial training helps to hone movement principles necessary for natural performances. I saw myself on a mission, to live a life as a martial artist, but keep in mind

how I can use everything I learned to better teach stage combat and fight choreography, and bridge the gap between the two worlds

**LEFT: Justin Krall
in action.**

for a balance of safety and realism for audiences and students alike.

Wishing to further my study in post grad, I decided to see if there was a way to pursue training full time. I found Maling Kung Fu Academy with a Google search. It was an international academy, and comparably more affordable than deciding to go to a stunt school or various month long intensives in the USA. I spent several years training in America and pursuing work as I saved up to take a year off and study kung fu almost 6 hours a day 5 days a week in China, living in a dorm with 3 meals a day provided. So I went to China as a fight choreographer, determined to further explore how martial arts study can benefit a stage combatant, and furthermore, any theatrical performer.

China provided challenges I could not have foreseen. The school was just moving to a new building, which was good in some ways, but construction was still going on and a lot was missing, like private showers. I arrived in winter, but for the first couple months we had no hot showers, and I walked 30 minutes to and from a public shower in the village. It was also colder inside than it was outside, and our only source of heat was a heating pad for our beds when it got really cold. Electricity and water went off without warning. My stomach had trouble adjusting to the Chinese diet, but I trained through the stomachaches.

The teaching method is different in China than both theatrical and martial training in America. Many of my classes didn't have immediate instruction from the masters. Rather, they used a system of following the senior students. In time, I would have the responsibility to lead some classes myself. We did get some individual attention, but a great deal of self-teaching was encouraged. If we made a mistake, sometimes we'd get a swat with a staff, but nothing as brutal as the masters experienced during their own training I came to learn. Of course there was a language barrier, but that is less of an issue with a physical art and the help of a translator on hand.

Through the training, constant contemplation, journaling, interviewing our headmaster, and even performing kung fu on Chinese stage and TV I strove to understand the relationship between the martial and theatrical. My headmaster, Master Bao (or Shi Xing Jian according to his kung fu lineage and "Bao" as his family name and how we knew him), had this to say when I posed the question to him in one of our interviews. Through his wife (and translator, as I speak limited Chinese) Lisa Guo, he identified the basic differences



in movement between the trained and untrained. "Master Bao can tell if a dancer has had training," explains Lisa. "They already have flexibility and coordination, but they can benefit from learning kung fu moves for a wider knowledge of movement, and pursue the inner meaning of kung fu. He believes a dancer who is a martial artist will be more appealing because they have more spirit or soul."

Just like theatre, martial arts is an entire world by itself. Not only are there loads of different styles and systems out there, but even within one system of martial arts there are so many different



ABOVE: Applications class, outside at the academy. Avi (center) reviews knife defense move as Justin (right) stabs center.

OPPOSITE, TOP: Outside at the academy, forms class, Master Bao shows Justin a jumping move that can be used in two-person form, parrying down with swords in a jumping side split.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: A trip with the school for qigong class and a photo shoot at a nearby temple. Daisy, the translator, stands center.

takedowns, applications, qigong, conditioning, power training, power stretching, and stamina training. I might have started with dance and physical movement through my University's curriculum, but martial training gave me additional benefits, some of which I want to highlight now. Rather than describe the exact classes I took I will explain what I learned from kung fu, with focus on theatre and stage combat.

Movement—You Can FEEL the Difference

FOR ME, THE MOST OBVIOUS BENEFIT to martial training would be coordination and better reflexes. My classes would dedicate swaths of time to learning different footwork and hand patterns, from the simple to flourishingly complex. Not only that, but honing one's reflexes from defensive drills and sparring is highly beneficial. This makes learning fight choreography easier on mind and body. And not all movement is seen. It can be felt by the practitioner. For instance, practicing martial arts, especially some slow moving forms such as those in tai chi, can improve someone's balance in both senses of dynamic and static. Furthermore, with all the work in traditional martial arts on proper stances such as horse stance, cat stance, low

sub-fields. This is why people spend their entire lives studying it. Whether they are a casual student, professional, or training to become a master, there is always more to learn. Just at Mal-ling Shan alone we had classes in tai chi, shaolin forms, sanda (kick boxing), shaolin basics, shaolin acrobatics,

since we had no mirrors. Now I am far more aware of how I hold my pelvis, and in fact notice a great deal of people doing what I used to do!

Postural awareness is quite important to develop, regardless of role. It will help actors adjust their stage presence to the needs of a director in a flash, as opposed to struggling to understand what they may be doing wrong. Dancers and physical performers obviously need this awareness more than anyone else, as they tell their story exclusively with their bodies. It works just as well with stage combat. Say you're playing an experienced swordsman for one show, then a novice the next. You must be able to portray both parts! Postural awareness goes deeper than what we can see. If we train to be more aware of how we stand, we begin to train proper alignment in both a static and dynamic sense. Proper body alignment leads to functional use for physical artists such as grounding or maintaining a strong root. This is important for a dancer or acrobat to have a strong base when supporting another, and when practicing aerial movement, being able to land gracefully and securely is a must. Aside from looking better, if you get to this next level of conscious postural training, being able to feel how your body is shaped at what moments can even make a difference in your footwork, and helps you move easier and more naturally through a fight scene.

Having mentioned aerial movement, I am compelled to mention that there are many momentum based movements in my study of Shaolin kung fu, such as a tornado kick, or butterfly kick (both of which are flashy moves for a fight, and have variations for dance), which have helped me understand the physics of momentum. I have learned how to better generate momentum as well as control and stop it.

Perhaps the greatest benefit to body alignment is the general kinesthetic awareness and feeling sensitivity one can get from training in martial arts. For the past few years, I have also studied contact improv dance, and it's worth mentioning that this provides the same benefit. Awareness is something that comes easier with conscious pursuit, and while general awareness might be achieved by accident, purposefully training to gain awareness, seeking that knowledge

stance, and plenty other stances, posture is also a large part of training.

In studying and performing theatre, I've heard countless directors and choreographers demand better or different (for those character roles) posture in their actors. For some people it seems to be something they understand when told, but their body doesn't. For the longest time I had a habit of sticking my butt out when I lowered into a cat stance; the problem was in my hips and pelvis. Master Bao gave me a wondrously embarrassing example of what I was doing wrong, the shaolin warrior monk jutting his butt out in an exaggerated manner, chiding, "not like this!". I desperately wanted to correct it, and I did through repetition and feel,



nets better benefits. Feeling sensitivity can not only help you understand your own body in terms of relaxation, weight shifting and centering, but partner work of the same nature as well, let alone improve the quality of your movement and speed of learning overall.

Practicality—The Art of Realism

BEING A PRACTITIONER of both stage combat and martial arts is wonderful because it ruins so much for you. , Have you ever watched a fight scene and thought “Why didn’t he just stab him instead of talk?” Or “Would their body really react like that?” Knowledge of both worlds has made me pretty critical of watching fight scenes of stage and film. On multiple occasions I’ve seen movement that simply doesn’t make sense, either in terms of body mechanics, tactics, or staging without hiding the “illusion” properly.

Studying self-defense applications has opened my eyes to how people can effectively defend themselves. As I’ve studied, I’ve been able to adapt applications to safely be performed on stage. Although I’ve seen many things portrayed that “wouldn’t work in real life,” I don’t want to be one of those choreographers.

Learning practical application of martial art can help with realistic stage violence. The above mentioned movement benefits are important for anyone, but the principles are inclusive in fighting styles as well. When I teach a new client stage combat, one of the first things I work on with them is making sure they are throwing a punch correctly. I remember noticing a photograph on a professional stage combat studio’s website of a girl throwing a punch. Though she looked excited, I could not escape seeing her errors in form.. Like many beginners, her fist and forearm were not aligned. She had never been trained to throw a punch, and had she been throwing the one in the photo she would have most likely injured herself. This is a very basic example of how learning a martial art can impact a theatrical movement. To help my students and clients with punches, I ask them to perform a push-up on their first two knuckles. This exercise forces their fists to straighten out, and I encourage them to memorize that feeling.

Again, this type of movement goes deeper than simply looking good. Although less people notice this next example, it is actually very noticeable to me. A proper punch is not in the arm alone, it’s in the entire body. It’s from the ground, through the feet and legs, hips and core, up through the shoulders and out the arm, then to the target. Now I know in stage combat we’re not actually going for a

LEFT: Justin practices jumping into a back break fall during Shaolin acrobatics class.

RIGHT: Justin practicing forms.



real strike, but we can make it look real, and to do so understanding the body mechanics behind a punch or a kick is absolutely imperative. Even if you’re playing an untrained brawler or other type of novice, you want a tool set that includes the expert, right? Master Bao would say kung fu training creates this experience:

”The performer may have learned their skill from a (theatre) school, but their acting draws from their life and experience. Marital arts is a type of life, it is experiential...so when an actor has that feeling and experience, it will make them more professional, and they will reach a higher degree of perfection.”

This leads to one crucial stage combat technique—falling. I’ve met a lot of people who are incredibly fearful of falling, and struggle as well with “combat rolls” or various types of shoulder rolls. Those days are over if you study martial arts-or at least, greatly improved upon. There comes a point in most fight scenes when someone kicks the bucket or is defeated, and they get knocked down. I started out learning basic and advanced falls and rolls in a stage combat class, and I really liked it. When I took up martial arts, learning to “break fall” was a big part of the training. At Maling Shan we have classes in shaolin acrobatics (jumps and rolls), and takedowns. In these classes we have worked on advanced break falls and have had loads of experience being taken down. One doesn’t necessarily have to try some of the advanced moves we practice, but it’s important to develop safe reflexes for falling.

This can even benefit a stagehand! I was helping to move a large set piece with fellow company members one day. The edge of the stage was just behind me. Despite all this awareness I’ve been preaching, in that moment my guard was down. I took a step back, and then fell a few feet down. Luckily everyone else held onto the hefty set piece, and I rolled safely into a bush. It wasn’t the bush that saved me, but I was unharmed because I had built up a better instinct for falling. One of my fellow company members asked me if I was okay, but then promptly quipped “well if that was gonna happen to anybody, it’s a good thing it was you.”

What I’m getting at is that it’s one thing to memorize the choreography of falling and rolling. In fact, if you can perform those difficult choreographed movements well, that’s awesome! But the next step is to know how to do it safely without choreography. If someone

suddenly took you down, and you fell, would you do it in a way that protected your body? I'm not saying we should improvise any take-downs or falls onstage, but we should have that sense and confidence built up from training, so that the self-protection principles are as ingrained in our bodies as possible. Although it is not ideal, if for some reason an advanced move in a fight scene goes wrong and you fall or flip a little differently, the last thing you want to do is tense up.

Health

IT'S IMPORTANT TO LOOK and feel good, and in the business of theatre, there's a tricky truth that looking good can make a difference. I don't intend for this to sound shallow. That is a debate for another article. Fitness and health are extremely important aspects of martial arts. At Maling Shan we have classes just for strength, and others just for endurance/stamina. One of our classes was specifically called "Stamina Training," we were to run a 10k through the countryside and nearby village, sharing the road with various vehicles and often getting barked at or chased by some of China's many stray dogs. Stamina was also important to get through some of the longer more advanced forms, especially in the summer heat, when no one wore a shirt and you didn't even have to move to start sweating. Although I'd say that looking good is secondary to the functional ability you develop, I have seen many people transform their bodies because of martial arts and extremely happy with it. As for functional ability, being able to go through up to several minutes of combat on stage, or dancing without getting tired, is a great attribute. Even if you're character is supposed to be tired at a certain point, it's better to act it than be it.

In addition, flexibility is also very important to martial arts study, especially shaolin, which I've been studying in China. Some moves just cannot be done without achieving certain range of motion in your legs and hips, such as aforementioned butterfly and tornado kicks. As for on stage, the benefits of that are obvious for dancers as they pursue the same kind of flexibility. For stage combatants, aside from unlocking the ability to perform certain flashy moves, even without that kind of kooky choreography, with a limber body one is more comfortable moving about even with the simplest of footwork and less prone for injury.

Mental—Relax Your Mind, Relax Your Body

I'D LIKE TO SHARE A FEW MORE thoughts on some of the less physical aspects of kung fu. There are mental and spiritual benefits of studying kung fu as well that are not to be taken for granted, because they too need conscious pursuit, and they too can benefit a performer. This conscious development includes a sense of

"self-cultivation" which Master Bao mentioned several times in our interview as a large part of study, and one of the benefits. Naturally, one's confidence will rise, which will show in everything they do. They will develop a sense of discipline, which will bring them a higher level of productivity and focus. They can and should practice meditation, which can bring them peace, and insight. Through meditation they can contemplate anything from life to some difficult choreography or character work, or simply clear their minds with thoughtless meditation.

In a practical sense, training in kung fu can improve a performer's memory for picking up movement, as they need to memorize many forms and movements, furthermore, the knowledge of combat and self defense it brings the performer, can actually serve as a foundation for safety, by being aware of how others can be hurt.

Another question I posed during my interview with Master Bao was what the proper mental state one should be in when they train kung fu. He answered: "One should be focused. Not distracted by anything, and willing to devote yourself to the training. Not thinking 'what if I get hurt or injured,' neither thinking 'what can I do after learning this, what can I learn?'" Just being present in the moment, focused." I couldn't help but notice the bit about "being present in the moment." Just focusing on the task at hand is arguably one of the most important aspects of acting.

In an environment a world away, his words of being in the moment reminded me of theatre, of why I was here. Theoretically I could have been anywhere, but a school like this can't be easily found anywhere else. Although constant training was utterly exhausting, and the living conditions were far different than mine in America, my experience was priceless and humbling. I challenged myself to strengthen body and mind. Through dedicated, intensive, long-term training I was able to make my body smarter on an instinctual level. I know more from the inside out, because I let go of what I thought I knew. Anyone has the ability to do this; you can make a trip to an academy like this for any length of time. But whether you leave the country or not, if you find the right martial art, you will be on a journey in pursuit of higher awareness within yourself, and with time and focus, one may start to understand what true being is. ✪

Endnotes

1 There's one more thing that we learn to notice and avoid, something called "zombie boxing." This is when we practice a technique and in throwing a punch out, we basically leave our arm there for our partner to practice. After a while, we should practice retracting it as someone properly defending themselves (or attacking) would. Noticing and managing this within fight choreography can make a big difference between making something look staged and giving it a more realistic edge.

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ACTING: RED TOOTH AND CLAW



BY JEAN A. MONFORT, AC

My first acting job, beyond College and Community Theater, was as a Celestial in a dungeon. Technically, I was a Celestial disguised as a Demon, sent to test patron/players into violence in a holy temple. In addition to my oversized sword and rather skimpy outfit, I was provided a pair of giant, non-articulated wings. They sat securely on my back and under my armpits, and added two feet to my overall circumference. Suddenly, I found my turning radius was off, as I bumped into tables, players, and props. There was a distinct lack of celestial grace or devilish ease in my movement. As an introduction to fantasy work, it was enlightening.

As I continued to work similar events in subsequent years, as a harpy (bird-woman, more wings and claws), chain devil (wearing roughly ten pounds of chains, wielding longshoremen hooks), ice demon (horns and motion-sensitive hand lights) and lich (undead with prosthetics) the roles were not always violent, but a few did require combat interaction. These experiences culminated for me in 2013 with the production of a *Klingon Christmas Carol* in Chicago. A hybrid of Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol* told from the point of view of the Klingon race of *Star Trek* fame. It is performed in Klingon, the language of that alien race (with English subtitles). It is also a prosthetic and combat heavy show, as the Klingons put great emphasis on physical prowess as a sign of personal worth.

It was during the show's run that I got to thinking about how best to approach fantasy violence. From the earliest plays depicting gods among men, to the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to modern haunted houses and Broadway productions, theater has always been a means of identifying with the fantastical and experiencing

something beyond ourselves. So how do we, as humans, transition the many fighting styles available to us to believably incorporate non-human movement?¹

Whether playing animals, aliens, or transformed humans, a re-evaluation of what we constitute as action, and therefore combat, must be addressed by each performer. For example, a zombie does not care about dismemberment. An alien may have redundant organ systems. Animal hybrids will use appendages to different effect. All these factors must inform the actor to portray believable combat, lest they fail to become anything other than performers in funny prosthetics. Acting can be incredibly challenging without non-species traits in the mix, yet there is no reason that adding fantasy elements should detract from an experience, for audience or actor. To get a better understanding on how choreographers look at fantasy violence, I spoke with two of the choreographers for *A Klingon Christmas Carol*: Marc Lancaster (AAC) for the Chicago production, and Jonathan Baca (CT) for the Cincinnati production.

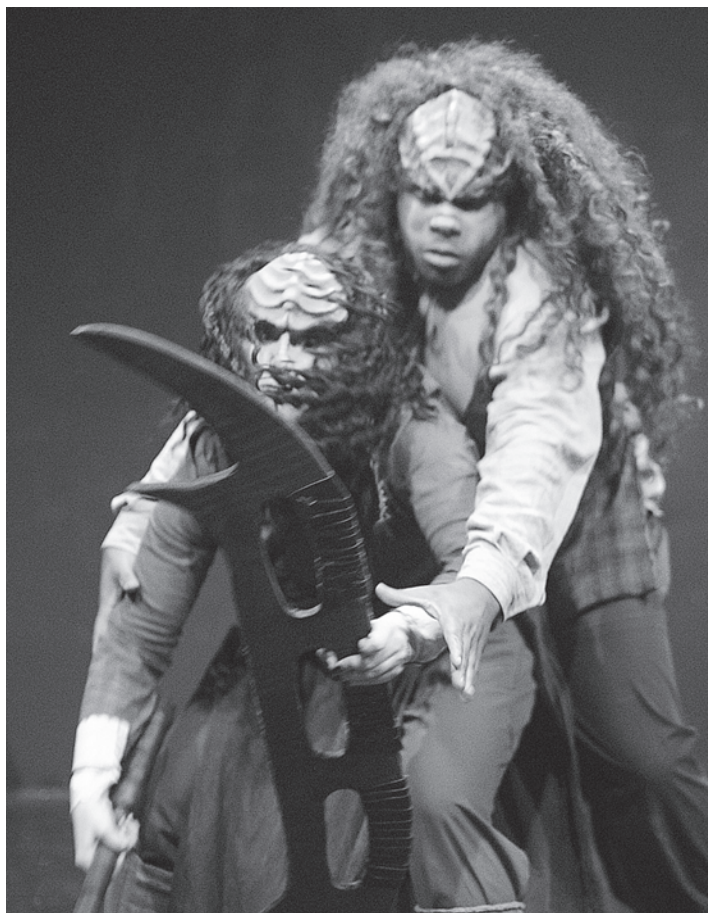
The most important thing an actor can do when approaching a non-traditional non-human role is to respect the mechanics of "new" movement. In the context of fantasy violence, new movement consists of mannerisms, angles, and attacks that fall outside organic human movement—so perhaps "foreign" movement is more accurate. If you have ever watched children pretending to be zoo animals, you have seen "new" movement. Through comparing human physiology to an animal's, strengths and weaknesses become clear. "We [humans] have great endurance, and adaptability, but we don't have wings, or claws, or fur," explains Baca. "When we have to translate that to fighting, there has to be an appreciation for what humans are capable of, so we can then try to build from there." Once an actor addresses basic points of movement differences, such as center of gravity, a character will hopefully develop organically. Both Lancaster and Baca agree that the unarmed combat sections of *Klingon* take on a different facet when characters have bony, ridged foreheads and a denser musculature. Head-butting becomes affectionate rather than confrontational.

Similarly, a fight with non-tradition/non-human weapons presents new challenges for choreographers. The bat'leH is the primary weapon featured in *A Klingon Christmas Carol*. It is a metal crescent with an interior blade, and the outer edge a handle. "When I first saw a bat'leH (pronounced bat-leGH, the second syllable is caught in your throat), I thought it was beautiful," admits Lancaster. "But then, once we started playing with it, it turned out to be a very impractical weapon. We had to really work to find its intention, so that the fights made sense." It has a lot of forward movement, with thrusting with the "flat" of the blade being the most natural, followed by some short form cuts reminiscent of quarterstaff fighting. During pre-rehearsal fight tech, we tried tossing the weapon around, tried turning them into swords, tried binds and croises. The latter did not work, as the curving ends of the bat'leH stopped casting energy. There wound up being more corps-a-corps than we thought, as the lack of range meant more pushing.

OPPOSITE: Jean Monfort (Marja') and Matty Robinson (Vred) grappling over a Bat'leH.

LEFT: (From left to right): Clark Bender, Kevin Alves, and Phil Zimmerman watching Wyatt Weber, and David Coupe duel in Commedia Beauregard's 2012 production of *A Klingon Christmas Carol*.

Fights in both productions reflected this. According to Lancaster, the fantasy allows for the choreographer to choose a style. "I looked at fights with more of a brawler's mentality. Klingons are more footballers in a bar





ABOVE: (From left to right): Amanda Raudabaugh, Brendan Stallings, Matt Gieschen, Dave Gonzalez, Colin Fewell, Stephen Dale, and Matty Robinson in a climactic brawl in Commedia Beauregard's 2013 staging of *A Klingon Christmas Carol* at the Raven Theater in Chicago.

LEFT: Jean Monfort as Chain Devil for True Dungeon's 2010 Adventure.

RIGHT: An Illithid attacking a patron during a True Dungeon event. The creature's first means of attack is by tentacle/psychic ability, as opposed to hands.



fight—huge and nasty. I eliminated leg and footwork.” The result was a Chicago staging with a looser flow and heavy unarmed work. Baca’s Cincinnati staging, by comparison, relied on tight forms due to space restrictions, as well as access to rarer fan-based texts on “historic technique” for Bat’leH fighting styles.

Of course, there is more to fantasy fighting than just movement and foreign weaponry. There are the elements which transform a human into the inhuman—the aforementioned wings, horns, and claws. In the case of *Klingon*, it involved facial prosthetics, ridges sewn into wigs that were applied with strong adhesives to the forehead and eyebrows. These pieces limited facial range of motion and peripheral vision. Combat was difficult for some performers, as sweating weakened the glue and so the entire piece. Wigs had to be pinned in securely so as not to go flying off into the audience. It was a week before tech when we first “ridged up,” and in that same week we practiced rediscovering fights with these newly imposed limitations.

There were stresses, naturally, to losing mobility, but there was also the fun of discovery. Working in fantastical settings, with

non-traditional roles and attributes allows for experimentation in the purest sense. There are no real historical texts to reference. Instead, choreographers and actors meld training and imagination. In our production of *Klingon Christmas Carol*, the first opportunity to handle weapons was full of excitement. As stage combatants with varying skillsets, most of us had training in the standard SAFD disciplines. Being handed alien weapons freed us to see what we could create, and because the characters weren’t human, we also experimented with body movement, shifting stances and weights to find dynamic balances. Baca utilized the same principles in working with

his Klingon fights as he did with the lightsaber classes he teaches: “When I teach light saber, it’s generally about a sense of play. I use it as a method to get actors out of ‘It must be like this.’ I teach the safety principles so we’re safe while fighting, but beyond that it’s letting people explore.”

Exploration can take different forms. An actor or choreographer faced with fantasy roles might consider first the basis of their new physicality. Recently, *Evil Dead the Musical* played in Chicago. The musical is based on the *Evil Dead* trilogy, a gore fest with zombies, demons, and a protagonist with a chainsaw for an arm. In a similar vein, the success of *The Walking Dead* is due in no small part to the effectiveness of the zombies, who do far more than simply walk about muttering “Brains...” Behind the scenes footage of on-set “zombie training” shows actors fighting without eye contact or speed. Movement was “heavy,” meant to portray unrelenting hunger. In film, compare the fighting styles of Peter Jackson’s elves and dwarves of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* franchises—the former light and acrobatic, the latter heavy and powerful, both informed by their creation mythos and physical attributes.

I would posit that first you must work to discover where a creature lives physically, and let that inform your fighting style. This is especially true if your fights involve natural weapons (teeth, claws, tails, etc.), in addition to the more traditional, manufactured weapons. Consider, for a moment, your teeth. We use our teeth everyday, though rarely do we use them on each other. The animal kingdom, by contrast, is full of toothy communication. Nips, snarls, bites—these are tools for communication and combat. If you are given a set of fangs to wear, they cannot simply be longer teeth in your mouth. They serve a purpose—exploring that purpose will help inform your action. My interviews support this point, to some extent. Lancaster and Baca both agree that if there is a pre-existing hierarchy for a creature that will influence how they approach violence. Brian LeTraunik (CT), suggested that all movement, human or non, comes from discovering a center, where “that basis will determine the majority of that character’s physicality, including how they fight.”

Where physicality and fighting style don’t necessarily mesh is when technology enters the picture, when the digi-grade stilts or tails create new limits. Ultimately we are, in fact, only human. We don’t actually have retractable claws, acid spit, horns, or otherworldly powers. We do sweat through our makeup and knock our prosthetics loose. Our fake wings make it harder to turn, and the more we put on to disguise ourselves, the harder it becomes to move effectively and thus perform safely and easily. The same goes for our partners. If you find a physical limitation, talk about it with your choreographer and/or director. This will help to stage fights that are not only safer for you, but stronger visually for the audience.

“That’s why movement training is key—find out your limitations and think about how to work with your new restrictions,” says Baca. “Take as much movement training as you can get.” A movement class, such as Laban or contact improvisation, will help you to understand your own range of movement. If you can’t find a class, that’s fine, you’ll just have to do the extra legwork to give your non-human character some personality. As a humorous example, I submit my research for playing a harpy. The role was not heavy on physical interaction, as we did not want to accidentally injure the patrons. I was, however, encouraged to grab anyone who wandered to close to me. To prepare for the role, I watched an hour or two of YouTube clips of birds of prey, especially grabs. Then I tried picking things up with “bird hands.” Birds, lacking thumbs, don’t grip from the side. Rather, they grab from the top, or “scoop,” using momentum. To imitate this, I experimented with moving my thumb so it was in

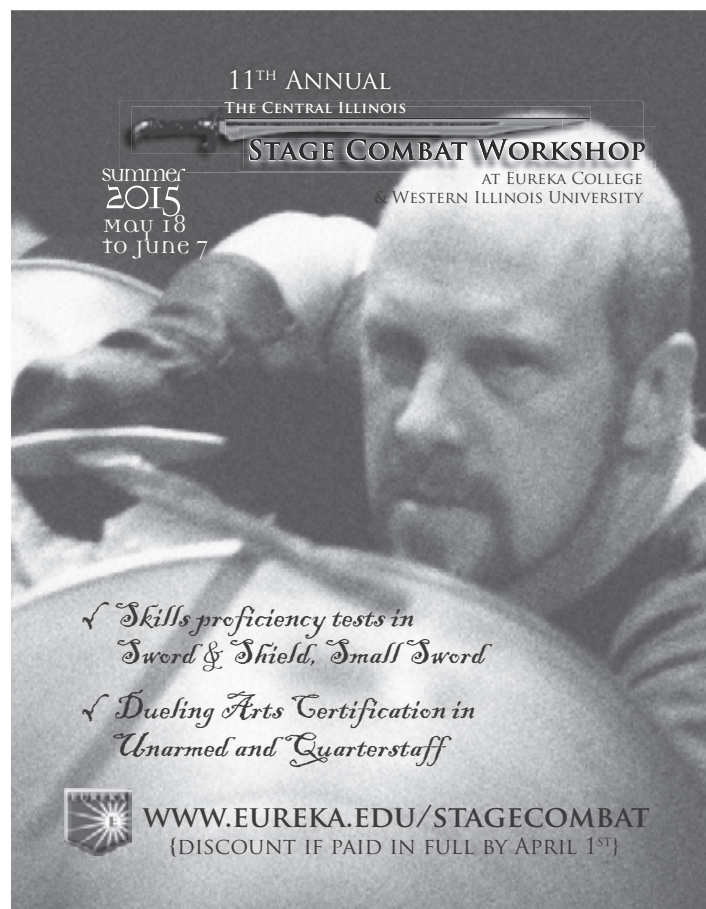
line with my middle finger, instead of out from the side of my hand, and then picking up small things in front of me. I also incorporated sharper body movement. It must be said that harpies traditionally also have the upper torso of a woman, and so I would have my hands and thumbs. However, being a meld of creatures, I did not simply wish to be a human with wings. Again, the goal is transcending being a woman in funny makeup.

The result was the sense of having a new vocabulary at my disposal. My mental verbs shifted to my new character. I perched—another movement which is not traditional, as most humans don’t spend great lengths of time balanced on the edges of things. Gripping in my new bird style—emphasized by heavy, elongated nails attached to my fingers—elicited shrieks and laughter, and more than one patron tried approaching me to get an idea of how the “special effects” worked.

Ultimately, when we create shows with fantastical elements, we try to transcend our basic frames. Whether the show is serious or slapstick, the goal is to give the audience a new perspective, a chance to let their imaginations run a little wilder. That sentiment should ring true with any performer, no matter how many tentacles they have. By exploring the basis of your creature’s movements, identifying your own limitations on that movement, and freeing yourself to explore, you can create dynamic theater moments sure to have the audience thinking about new frontiers (or, for the Klingons, the final frontier...). ✦

Endnotes

1. Note that when I speak about “fighting styles,” I primarily mean the eight disciplines of the SAFD—to consider all the weapons and styles available to us would be overly complicated.




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Richard Lane Emeritus Unlimited

BY BOB BORWICK



The SAFD has awarded Richard Lane the status of Fight Director Emeritus, an honor reserved for certified teachers, fight directors, and fight masters whose contributions to the SAFD and stage combat have enhanced and propelled the art forward for the next generations of practitioners. When asked for his response, Richard replied, “It is an honor that I dream not of.” A fitting line, uttered honestly and humbly, from someone who has served as fight director for at least 75 (he stopped counting) productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, in all forms (ballet, opera, modern, Elizabethan, post-apocalyptic, gender-bending, you name it). I worked closely with Richard for nine years as his assistant at The Academy of the Sword, a not-for-profit he co-founded in San Francisco. I recently spoke with him about his journey through theatre and stage combat.

Bob Borwick: Thanks for talking with me at 7 o’clock in the morning. Are you a morning person?

Richard Lane: Yes. I’m up at 6 a.m. everyday. I haven’t set an alarm since high school.

BB: It is a miracle you ever made a life in the theatre, with a natural alarm clock that cannot be reset. How did you get involved in theatre?

RL: When I was young I performed in community theatre. My parents were supportive. You know: “It’s fun, it’s cute, but you’re going to grow up to be a doctor, right?” Movement intrigued me but I wasn’t gifted. More like an actor who moves well.

BB: How did you get involved in stage combat?

RL: After I got kicked out of engineering college, I started working at the U.S. Post Office in the town where I grew up. I also performed in community theatre, took some local ballet lessons, commuted to NYC for classes at the Academy of Dramatic Arts and rode my bicycle everywhere. I had a lot of energy.

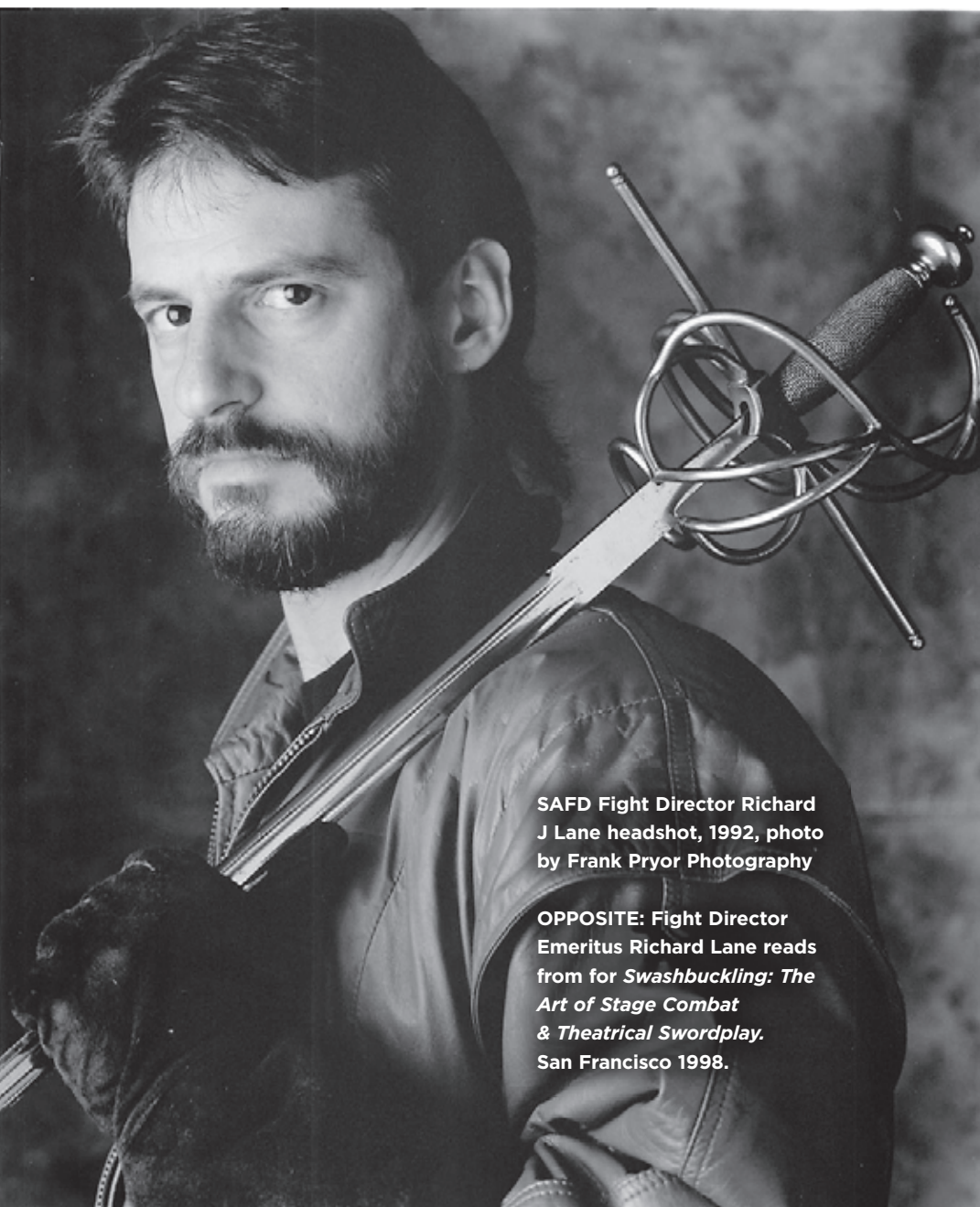
In 1979 I took “the big step” and moved into Manhattan. I started taking classes at HB Studios and a class called “Fencing for Actors.” That’s when I discovered the world of stage combat. I picked up a sword (they were foils back then) and thought, “Yes, I get this; I understand this.” Shortly after that I performed at the New York State Renaissance Faire on the weekends. I was one of the Queen’s guards in *The Legend of Robin Hood*. It was about running all day long with a sword in my hand. And when I wasn’t at the faire I would run on the West Side Highway. It was elevated and unused and I would take tiny weights, one in each hand and I would go run because I hoped that I would be running all day with swords in my hands, forever.

BB: You worked with a dance company, also, right?

RL: Yes. Through the post office I got transferred to New York City. Sorting mail, but always wanting to do movement, always wanting to do theatre. So when I told the post office I was quitting after ten years, one of my supervisors said, “You’ll never make it out there.” And I said, “Thanks, what about the ‘Good luck’ part?”

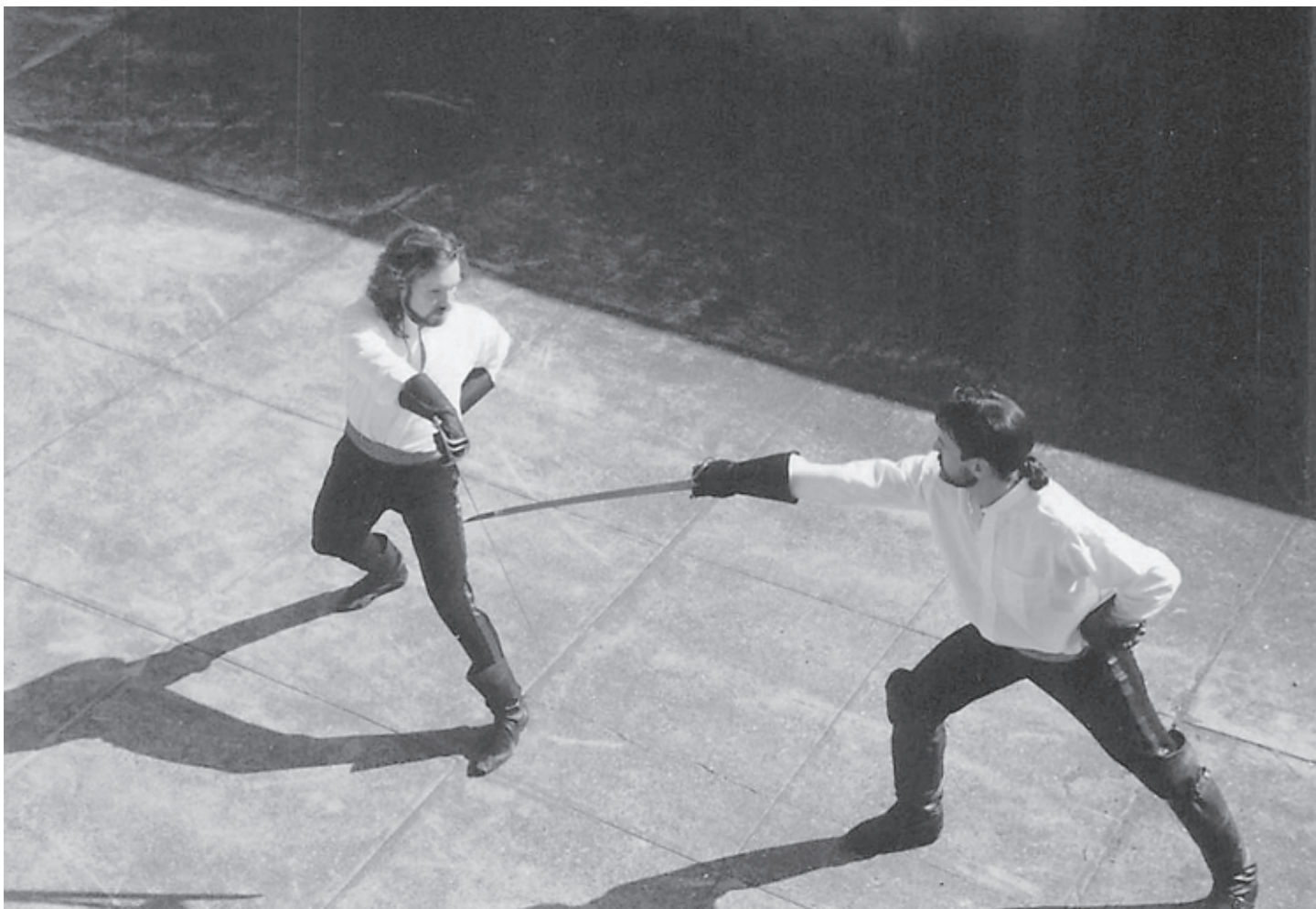
At that time I was dating a woman I had met at the Ren Faire. She came home one day with a brochure about how to produce your own dance concert for the Japanese/American Modern Dance Company with whom she was performing. I read over the materials and said, “Yes! I can help you with that.” So I ended up producing two weeks of sold out performances in Manhattan. I realized I had a gift for the administrative part of theatre.

I read through fifteen years of the dance company’s history so I could cold



SAFD Fight Director Richard J Lane headshot, 1992, photo by Frank Pryor Photography

OPPOSITE: Fight Director Emeritus Richard Lane reads from for *Swashbuckling: The Art of Stage Combat & Theatrical Swordplay*. San Francisco 1998.



call universities and producers and book performances. Ultimately I booked a West Coast tour that I ended up performing on. We went to Japan. We were there for six weeks and there were lots of activities arranged for us. I got to do kendo, judo, all kinds of different martial arts. Japanese archery (kyudo) was the coolest thing ever. I never hit the target once, but I looked really good doing it. They called me “The Sensei of Style.” That’s when I first started understanding how my body worked. Which is a little important for stage combat. Because it doesn’t matter what body type you are just as long as you’ve got some control over it.

BB: Who was your first stage combat teacher?

RL: I have to say Steve Vaughan, who is still a fight director with the SAFD. He and I would get together on the rooftop of the apartment next door to where I was living and do fights all day long. We would create choreography. We would do athletic dueling. We would pad ourselves up and put on fencing masks and gloves and we would spar with rapier and dagger, just to figure out what worked and what didn’t work. Our only rule was no thrusting with the daggers, for obvious reasons. So, Steve Vaughan was a huge influence on me and really my first fight partner, first teacher. He had been working with J. Allen Suddeth and really knew a lot. Steve was incredibly strong, smart, personable and a real strong influence. Steve introduced me to J. Allen Suddeth and Allen showed me a grace and style that was breathtaking. Allen is just a beautiful mover. I wasn’t a gifted mover. I wasn’t that in tune with my body at that point. Rolls and falls were just bruising the heck out of me. I left stage combat, fell into dancing and discovered how my body

worked. Then came back to stage combat later and didn’t get nearly as bruised.

BB: So you went into dance *after* stage combat?

RL: That’s right. I was introduced to stage combat and beat myself up. Then stopped. Then did the world of modern dance. Then came back to stage combat.

BB: When I met you in 1988, you were the head of Touché Unlimited, which was later re-imagined as The Academy of the Sword. How did you start that company?

RL: I had moved from New York to San Francisco and began looking for stage combat instruction. The SAFD former Fight Master with whom I was training, J.R. Beardsley, wanted to have a company called Touché. I said, “Touché is great, but it needs to be more than that.” To be “Unlimited” meant that we could do anything we wanted to if we put our minds to it.

The idea was really cool because stage combat could be whatever we wanted it to be. There was no perfect way. It didn’t matter who you were or your body type or gender, or if you had any physical challenge, you could still do stage combat. Stage combat was this freeing and unlimited possibility to me. At that time I had this idea in my head, right or wrong, that you can really do anything if you just say “yes” to it.

BB: It sounds like you’ve been saying “yes” your entire life. You are like the ultimate Yes Man. But not the way that label is usually meant. Help me here.



OPPOSITE: Stills from the trailer for *Castle Falkenstein*; SAFF Certified Teach Bob Borwick (l) and SAFF Fight Director Richard Lane (r), Fort Point, San Francisco 1993

ABOVE: SAFF Certified Teacher Bob Borwick (bottom) helps SAFF Recommended Actor/Combatant Jonathan Rider catch some air aboard the Hawaiian Chieftain in San Francisco Harbor for *Popular Mechanics for Kids*.

TOP RIGHT: Certified Teacher Bob Borwick trains in Rapier & Dagger at the Academy of the Sword, 1991. Background (l to r): Erin Merritt, Al Elkins, Recommended Actor/Combatant Kit Wilder.

RIGHT: Timothy Flanagan evades a swipe from Eric Zivot in Marin Shakespeare Company's *Macbeth* (c. 1990). Fight Director: Richard Lane. From *Swashbuckling: The Art of Stage Combat & Theatrical Swordplay*.



RL: Well, not so much a Yes Man as a Life of Yes.

BB: YES! That sounds like a pretty positive approach to life.

RL: And if you are going to say “yes” to something, then do whatever it is as best you can. I used to have quotes that would run around in my head. One of my favorites was from Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Even if it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, go out and sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Handel and Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

BB: What is your approach, your take on stage combat?

RL: Stage combat, to me, if I summed it up would be: trust and commitment. It is not about you. It is about the trust and commitment you have to your partner. If there is trust and commitment between you and your partner, the two of you can do anything. When you are onstage performing a fight, nothing else matters. The audience goes away and it’s just you and your partner trying to make each other look good. My book, *Swashbuckling*, is dedicated to my parents. “To my parents on their 50th wedding anniversary, the true measure of trust and commitment.”

BB: What has been the most rewarding aspect of a life of fake fighting?

RL: Learning to say “yes” whenever possible. “No” sets up all

sorts of blocks to learning and the creative process; physical fitness and being “delicious” in your movement; working in an art form that is both rooted in our ancestry and history, and is still being created; and the idea that if you set your mind to it, you can do it. But just do one thing at a time. Don’t get balled up in all the other things that are going on in your life. And that is the Aikido lesson, right? How do you fight more than one person at a time? Well, you can’t. You can only fight one person at a time, and... what was your question?

BB: It doesn’t matter. That was perfect. How has the SAFD served you?

RL: There are loads of people out there who do stage combat, who want to teach stage combat, who want to fight direct. The SAFD gave me that seal of approval. I could go into a theatre, into a university, into a middle school and say, “Yes, I am a fight director, and I am certified by this organization.” So it really gave me my 007, my license to kill.

BB: It sounds so simple to become a Certified Teacher of Stage Combat and a Fight Director in the SAFD. Was it easy for you?

RL: Well, “anything worth having is worth fighting for.” I was told at the time of my Teacher Training that I needed more influences on my style than just Beardsley. I was given Probation. This gave me permission to call any and every Fight Master at the time and ask, “What are you working on? Can I come help?”

And so I traveled to spend time with Fredricksen, Boushey, Leong, Suddeth, Fracher, Martinez. I also got to walk through the woods with Paddy Crean, and visit William Hobbs in London. I met Oscar Kolombatovich in Madrid and later he would pen the forward to *Swashbuckling*. Even later, with every SPT I taught, I would bring in a different Fight Master to adjudicate, just to spend time with them and get their feedback on my work and my students’ work.

BB: The Emeritus status is granted to those who have made significant contributions to the art of stage combat and the Society throughout their careers. What would you say is your most significant contribution?

RL: I would say it would be *Swashbuckling: The Art of Stage Combat and Theatrical Swordplay*. With the guidance of my co-author, Jay Wurts, I wrote down everything I could about stage combat, and credited those who were my teachers. Jay once asked me if I had ever thought about writing a book. I said, “Yes.”

BB: Of course you did. Everyone *thinks* about writing a book.

RL: Well at some point long ago I discovered Miyamoto Musashi’s *Book of Five Rings* and the term *Bunbu Ichi*, “The pen and sword in accord.” So that opened my eyes to the possibility of combining my talents. I learned so much more writing the book than I knew before we wrote it. The book was received well enough to deserve a second printing and simultaneous publishing in NY and London.



ABOVE: Richard Lane Fight Director Emeritus, 2014

RIGHT: The President’s Award—a sword by Lewis Shaw. Upon receipt, newly appointed Fight Director Emeritus Richard Lane said, “It is an honor I dreamed not of.”

I also assisted at every SAFD workshop I could, served as the West Coast Regional Rep, produced the SAFD skills tests I taught as theatre events to a ticket buying public. I wrote press releases, did interviews, and encouraged everyone who showed an interest to go to the National Workshop. SAFD was a gift to me, and I wanted to give back as much as I could.

BB: So, why are you retiring?

RL: I knew that was going to come up. I don’t have a master’s degree and am not affiliated with a university. I made a living at this stuff for, uh, a really long time and there came a point where I needed more stability. It is hard to earn a lot of money as a stage combat guy without having a university job or something consistent. Even being the Resident Fight Director for a theatre company doesn’t guarantee that they’ll be producing shows that need your skills (or have them recognize that they need your skills). So, I really was running around and needed to settle down. I needed to be in one place to have a relationship and I was traveling a lot around the country doing opera, ballet, theatre, and teaching. My wife Alison and I decided that we both wanted to be in the same place at the same time. People would ask me what I did for a living. My answer, “I drive. Occasionally I get out of the truck and jump around with swords, but mostly I drive.”

BB: What were some of your favorite projects?

RL: Without a doubt the number one project was *A Clockwork Orange* at University of Nevada, Reno that you and I did together. The synergy of music, dance and ultra-violence really stretched our skills. I also did a ballet of *R&J* that was reprised four times. Every

couple of years the company would call wanting to do it again. I also enjoyed Marin Theatre Company's *Réj*, where I was given lots of latitude. I worked with the Music Director Billie Cox to compose the music to the fights. Usually it's the other way around. Billie and I had a great time, as did the actors. It took everyone's involvement to another level. There was also a production of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* at Theatreworks where I was asked to choreograph the seduction of Cécile de Volanges. *Equus*, choreographing the blinding of the horses, a ballet version of *Zorro* with Smuin Ballet, several versions of *The Three Musketeers*, including a musical version, and a circus version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which led to my teaching at the San Francisco School of Circus Arts, and becoming the Managing Director of Make*A*Circus, a legendary San Francisco Institution.

BB: You say you're not affiliated with a university, but you've had longstanding relationships with a lot of theaters and schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, right?

RL: Oh, yeah. I taught "Movement for Actors" at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music for ten years and the San Francisco Opera Merola Program for eight years. I served as Resident Fight

Director at Marin Shakespeare Company for 19 years and at Theatreworks for ten years. I also taught stage combat at Nueva/Odyssey Middle School forever.

BB: Forever?

RL: Well, forever in middle school years. Which is probably longer than dog years. It was great. I took middle school students to Japan for three weeks, six years in a row.

BB: So, what are your plans for the future?

RL: I am now a free-lance Controller or a Comptroller, if you look up the etymology of the word, the keeper of the rolls. I help businesses manage their income and their expenses. Right now I am the comptroller for the Magic Theatre in San Francisco amongst other clients.

BB: Well, now that *Swashbuckling* is everywhere, you can stay at home and still reach hoards of people, right?

RL: Yes! I got an email just the other day from someone who was in the library in Edinburgh, and she wrote, "Oh, I saw your book on our shelves." Really? That thing is going to live on forever, long after we are all gone.

BB: If you had never left the Post Office and fallen into stage combat, what would you have become?

RL: A Zen-Psychopath?

BB:...

RL: Or an administrator. I don't know. There was no other choice but theatre. I have the skills for an office job, but I don't have the personality for it, too much aggression, too much passion.

BB: If you could choose a new weapon discipline for the SAFD, what would it be?

RL: Whip. It comes up in a number of plays, not the least of which is *Man of La Mancha*. The problem with teaching bullwhip is you need a lot of room.

BB: And it hurts.

RL: Yes, it is a self-correcting discipline. When you make a mistake with the whip, it lets you know.


BB: Who would you rather be trapped on an island with: Bruce Lee or Chuck Norris?

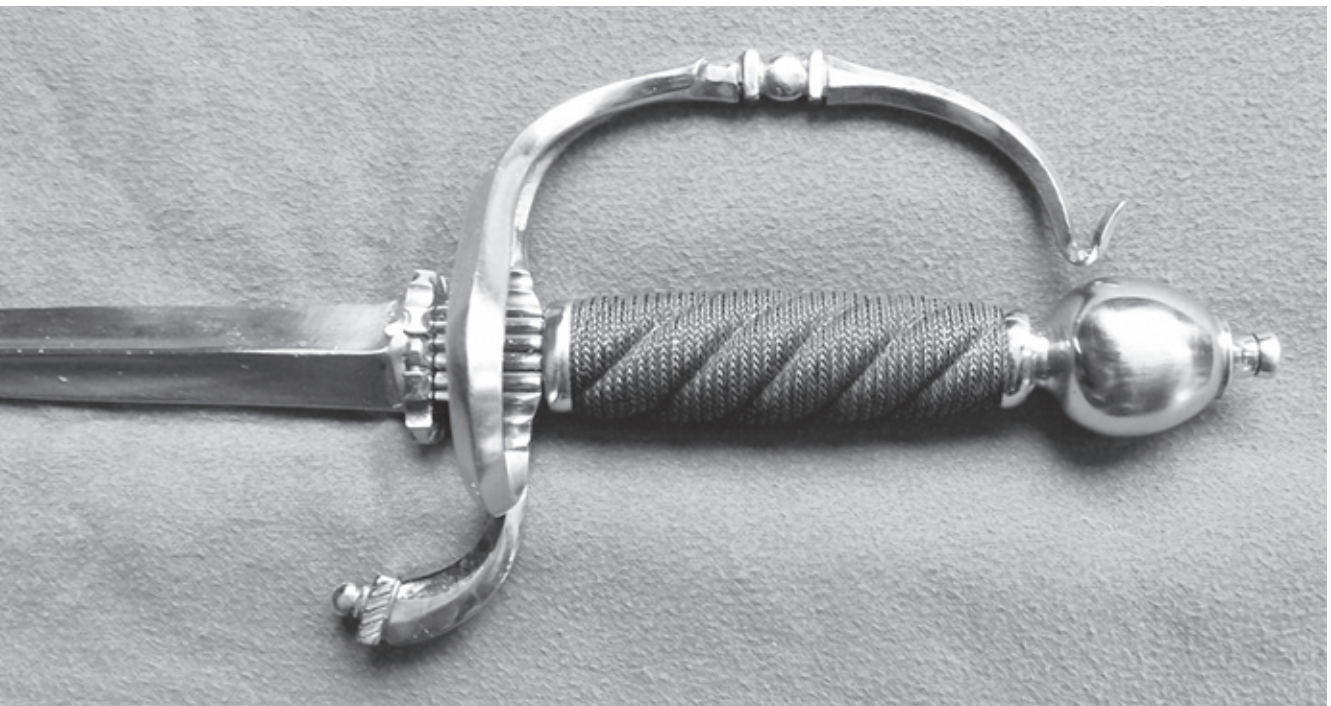
RL: Bruce Lee, because of his unlimited aspect. I think Bruce Lee simply thought he could do everything. There was a twinkle in his eye, mischievousness in what he did and I really respect the mischievousness.

BB: Do you have any parting words of wisdom you want to give to the SAFD and theatre community?

RL: When I was acting, it was "Read Everything." You want to fill up your internal library. As a movement performer, you want to "Take Every Class You Can" because it is going to inform you later on as a movement artist. And say "Yes" to opportunities. They won't all work out but how much fun when they do. By the way, did I tell you I am studying ukelele? I picked it up about two years ago because I needed to do something new. I need to figure out how to sharpen it, though.

BB: Is it playing a little flat?

RL: That's cute, real cute. Touché. 



Fight Matters

“What’s in a



BY JOSEPH TRAVERS, SAFD FD/CT

Looking at some old files, I found myself leafing through dog-eared programs and turning over fading contacts sheets from many years of staging fights and action sequences. I felt drawn to consider the various titles given to those intrepid souls who choose this exciting, rewarding, never-a-dull-moment occupation. At one time or another, I have been called *director*, *choreographer*, *coordinator*, *consultant* or *adviser*, (all with the word “fight” in front of them). I know colleagues who have been called by or used the title *fight arranger*, *action coordinator*, *movement consultant* or *violence designer*. While I’m sure we’d all agree that any credit is better than none, this idea of a name intrigued me. I found myself asking Juliet’s question—“What’s in a name?”—and I resolved to investigate what the preferable, most accurate, and possibly “best” name for this job of ours might be. I’m inviting you to go along on this quest with me.

I decided to begin in a simple, reasonably reliable place—the New Oxford American Dictionary (to be completely candid, I used the one in my laptop). I began by comparing definitions. I present them to you as I found them, with some thoughts about each one. Interestingly, some words appeared in the dictionary chiefly as verbs, others as nouns. Let’s start with the verbs:

Choreograph—compose the sequence of steps and moves for a performance of dance. Except for the word dance, this definition

is very applicable. But does it cover everything? Surely we do more than this...

Coordinate—bring the different elements of (a complex activity or organization) into a relationship that will ensure efficiency. Yes! That’s it! We definitely coordinate! This does seem to leave out the aspect of creation, though, which *choreograph* possessed...

Arrange—put (things) in a neat, attractive, or required order: adapt for performance. Nice! Almost elegant! But as with

“choreograph,” there’s so much more to what we do, that this hardly seems enough. Plus *arrange* can make it seem like the things being arranged might have been created by someone else. Again, we are not acknowledging the creative part of the process, and we don’t want to leave that out. This isn’t just a job—we’re theatre artists!

Having made it through the words that appear as verbs, let’s look at those that appear as nouns:

Consultant—a person who provides expert advice professionally. Indeed! We *are* experts! Expertise aside, though, the term consultant can seem clinical, uninvolved. Usually, we’re not only providing suggestions, but we’re implementing them as well. Our sleeves are rolled up. We’re in the trenches.

Adviser—a person who gives advice, typically someone who is expert in a particular field. This seems almost a synonym for *consultant*.

promising! In the spirit of being thorough, it seems important to also not take any of our “prefixes” for granted, so let’s look at them:

Movement—an act of changing physical location or position or of having this changed. Well, yes, we do that, but then by this definition the director and choreographer also deal with movement, so this is just not specific enough.

Action—a gesture or movement. This seems even broader than the term *Movement*, but at least the word “action” might make folks think of *action films*, which is not a bad association. We’re getting closer!

Violence—behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. I might be being picky, but this is what we want it to *seem* like, not actually *be*. Also, not all violence is physical—contemporary society recognizes verbal and psychological forms of violence. Calling what we work with *Physical Violence* would make it sound too cumbersome.

Fight—a violent confrontation or struggle. Let’s think about this one—it seems clear, and it definitely distinguishes us from other departments, but again we’re not exactly being precise, are we? It isn’t actually fighting we’re working with, but that which *seems* to be fighting. From a

certain point of view, it’s even less actual fighting than, say, make-up is someone’s actual appearance, and they don’t call Make-up Design “*Face Design*.” Also, you could claim *Fight* is too specialized—what about all the stuff we stage that isn’t fighting or violence—feints, trips, lifts, falls, carries, catches, etc.? Still, the term *fight* is instantly recognizable—everyone knows what we mean when we talk about the show’s fights.

So perhaps, after all this exploration, *Fight Director* is the term that serves us best. It is certainly far from perfect, and like our other favorite term, *stage combat*, it both limits things *and* leaves out much of what we include in our work. Maybe there is no *ideal* replacement. We do have the advantage of several international organizations, lots of writers, directors, actors and producers all using the term *Fight Director* already. Need we search for an alternative?

We fight directors are still a relatively young brood in the theatre (almost as young as sound designers). We may still be feeling our way in many respects. It may be that some day soon, the perfect name (or just a new name) for what we do will emerge. After all, theater directors are called *regisseurs* in other lands, and the term *choreographer* dates back only to 1936, when it was first used to credit Balanchine’s work in *On Your Toes*.

What *is* in a name? Lamenting the name of her lover, Juliet asks, “What’s Montague?” (We might ask, “What’s *Fight Director*?”)

“...It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man....
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d,
retain that dear perfection which he owes
without that title...”

Our work is *Our Work*—it will always be more important than what we call ourselves. If we do it well, always giving our best, the work transcends titles. Then, if someday (as Romeo wishes) we are “new-baptiz’d,” we can be sure that what we do

“...by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Name?”

Also, I think we’d all agree that we want our job to be more than just giving advice. As we said about consulting, we like to be the ones to implement that advice as well. I know few fight directors who feel comfortable just advising and walking away. We’re a “boots-on-the-ground” lot.

Designer—a person who plans the form, look, or workings of something before its being made or built. Yes, indeed! We *plan*! It’s good to get that acknowledged. But we do way more than *design* a sequence. We hone it, shepherd it and interface with everything around it to assure its efficacy and safety. We’re in rehearsal, helping to make each moment work.

Director—a person who supervises the actors, camera crew, and other staff for a movie, play, television program, or similar production. Okay, let’s take a pause here, because this title typically goes to the person responsible for the overall production. Before we consider using it, let’s examine a few aspects of the term. In our job, we definitely do *supervise*. And while using the definition above will help include all the facets of our work, like choreography, coordination with other departments, etc., it also touches on the truth that, like the Director, our main relationship is with the actors. We are working one-on-one with the cast in rehearsal, in a way a designer rarely does. The level of intimacy with their performances is on par with that of the Director, so the term “director” seems very apropos. Do we need to be concerned about confusion with the role of the project’s overall Director? Does the use of the name bring us into conflict?

If we take a page from the world of musical theatre, we find that the Musical Director has a clear and well-defined role that is not in conflict with the overall Director’s. The Musical Director also has a one-on-one relationship with the performers, and usually everyone involved recognizes the importance of that relationship and its ultimate separation from (and when necessary, subservience to) that of the Director. So there is precedence.

At this point in our investigation, among all the terms we’ve reviewed describing our actions, the term *Director* is looking quite



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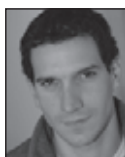
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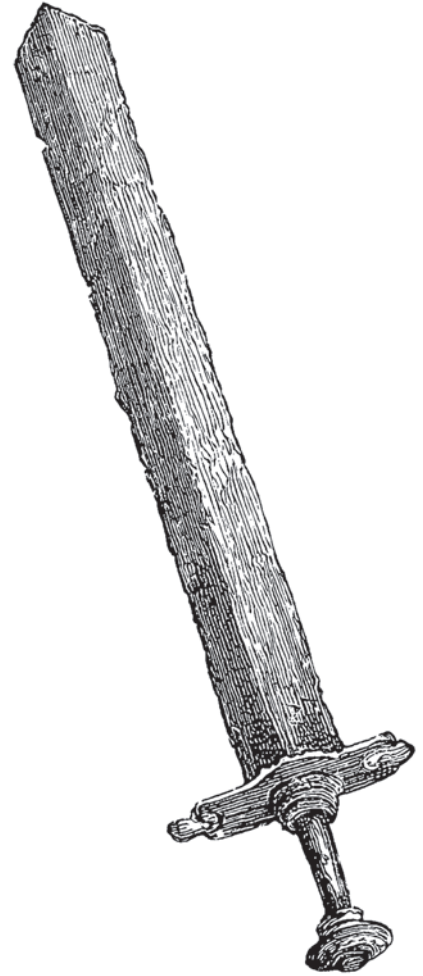
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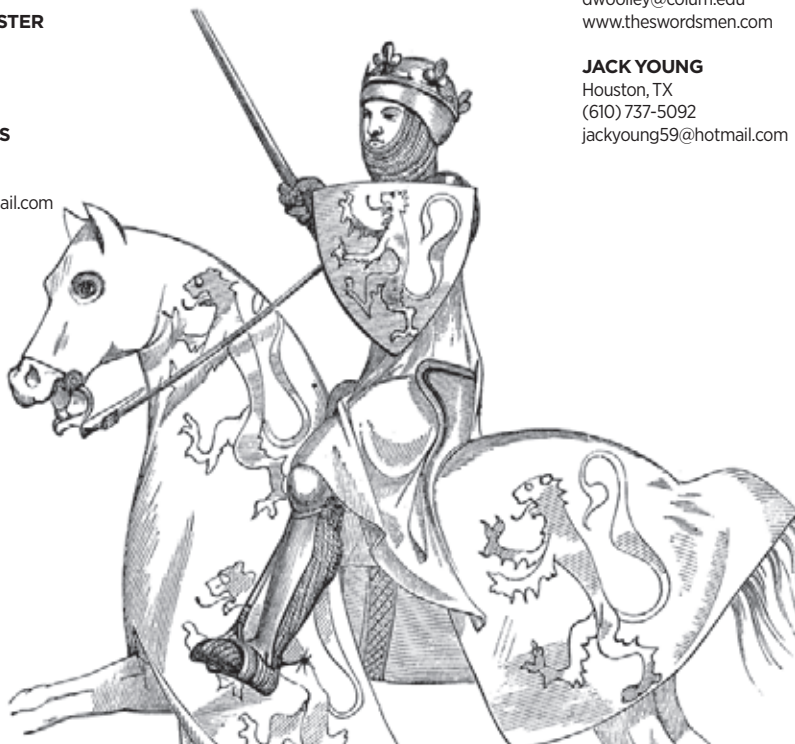
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IntlRegRep@safd.org





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.

33% savings
for new
members!

Join or Renew Your Membership Today!

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.

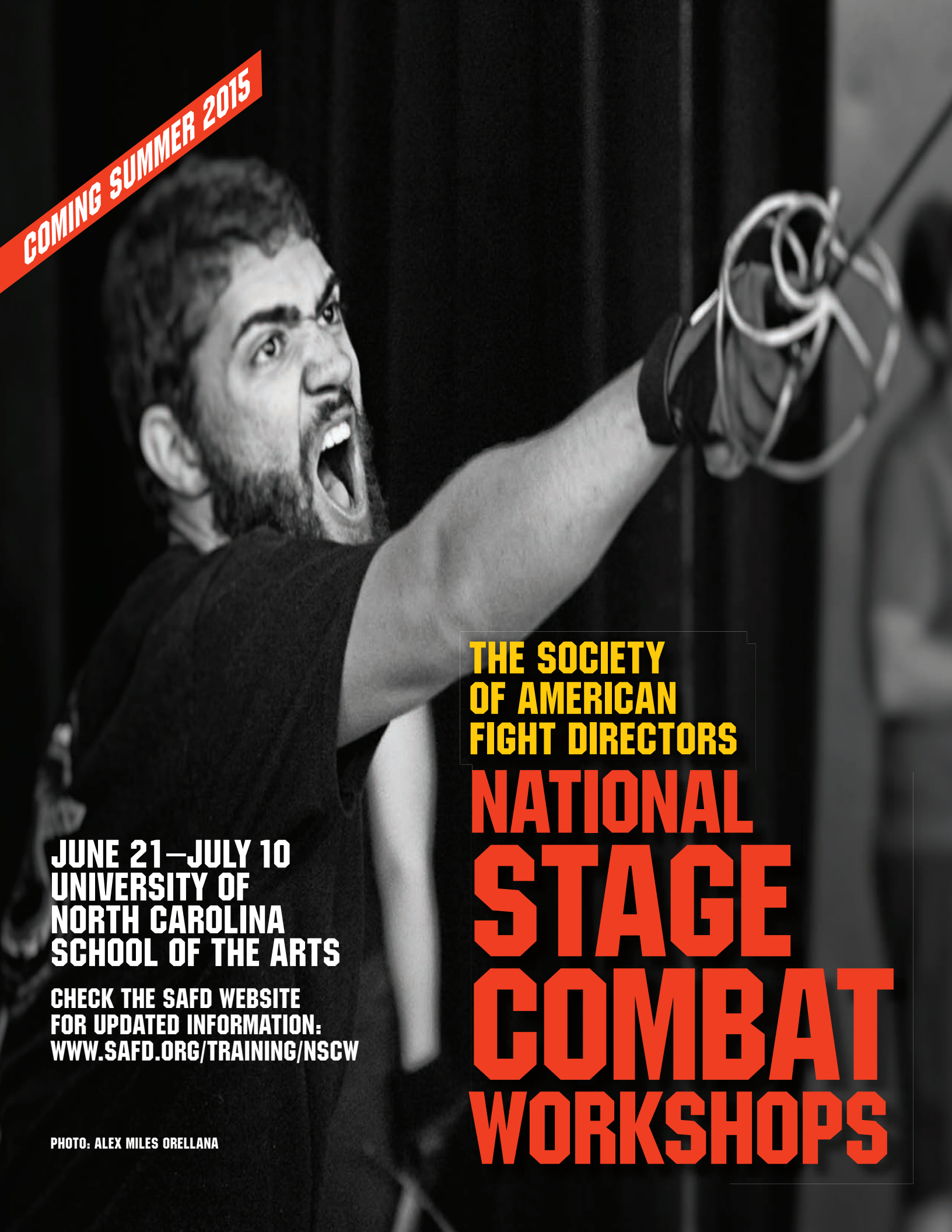
If you are a current or previous member of the SAFD, renewing costs as little as \$45.00 per year.

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.





COMING SUMMER 2015

**JUNE 21—JULY 10
UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS**

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

PHOTO: ALEX MILES ORELLANA

**THE SOCIETY
OF AMERICAN
FIGHT DIRECTORS**

**NATIONAL
STAGE
COMBAT
WORKSHOPS**