Theatre 1- Stanislavsky Method

**WHAT IS STANISLAVSKI TECHNIQUE?**

You might have heard of Stanislavski and his ‘technique’; his name is used a lot in acting classes; but it can be tricky to understand what Stanislavski Technique or method actually is. Born in 1863, Konstantin Stanislavski was a Russian actor, director and theatre practitioner. Stanislavski Technique stems from his theatre practice and is still used by actors all around the world today. The method is an actor training system made up of various different techniques designed to allow actors to create believable characters and help them to really put themselves in the place of a character.

**Stanislavski and his *Given Circumstances***

Understanding the world of your character is absolutely vital to creating a believable performance; Stanislavski used this idea to create *Given Circumstances*. The first step towards doing this is going through the play and writing down all the facts about your character you can find! Example questions you might ask as you go through the script could be:

Where Am I? When is it? (The year/the day/time of day etc) Who Am I? (Name/age/your family history/what you do for work etc) What relationships do I have? What has happened before the play started?

***The Magic If***

Stanislavski describes *The Magic If* as being able to imagine a character’s given circumstances enough to understand what that character might do in any situation that arises. So when something happens to your character in the play you can understand how they would respond because you know so much about the world that they exist in.

**Tasks and Objectives**

Once you have understood the Given Circumstances and mastered the Magic If, Stanislavski encourages the actor to unearth their character’s ‘tasks’ or ‘objectives’. Characters always have a number of ‘tasks’ they wish to solve. To find this out you ask ‘What Do I Want?’ in each scene and in the play as a whole. For example, in The Lion King, Scar wants to become King, so his task is to kill Mufasa.

## 6 Principles of the Stanislavski Method

The Stanislavski method comprises a few core principles to help actors emotionally connect to their character and the material:

1. **The Magic If**: Foundational to the Stanislavski method are the concepts of “given circumstances” and “the Magic If.” According to Stanislavski, the actor ought to imagine themself in the circumstances as given by the play. This approach can activate the actor’s imagination and intimately connect them to the material, bringing life to the character.

2. **Objective**: The Stanislavski system focuses on motivation and emphasizes the character’s objective. When rehearsing each scene, the actor should ask themselves about the objective of the character in that moment. Taken altogether, these moments create an emotional throughline over the course of the whole play, which can be thought of as a “super-objective.”

3. **Emotional memory**: One route to a successful portrayal is through “emotion memory” or “emotional memory.” This involves the actor drawing upon personal experiences to inflect their performance, giving it greater urgency and authenticity. For instance, an actor attempting to depict grief might draw upon their own similar experience, if they had previously lost someone close to them.

4. **Tempo-rhythm**: Stanislavski’s technique aims to create a rhythm or tempo in the play in congruence with the emotional intensity of the performances.

5. **Method of physical action**: The method of physical action was a later development of Stanislavski’s. This was a shift, as it led to greater emphasis on physical movement and improvisation over verbal discussions and reflection.

6. **Subtext**: Stanislavski believed that the overall meaning and emotional thrust of the play was only partly implied by the text, and so part of the role of the actor was to discover and understand this submerged content, which he called the subtext of the play. The actor then expressed this subtext through the details of his or her performance.

The Stanislavsky system requires that an actor utilize, among other things, his emotional memory (i.e., his recall of past experiences and emotions). The actor’s entrance onto the stage is not a beginning of the action or of his life as the character but a continuation of the set of preceding circumstances. The actor has trained his concentration and his senses so that he may respond freely to the total stage environment. Through empathic observation of people in many different situations, he attempts to develop a wide emotional range so that his onstage actions and reactions appear as if they were a part of the real world rather than a make-believe one.