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Creating Work With Universal Appeal

Marcos Martinez & the Suzuki actor training method

By Kat Avila | Web Published 3.11.2002

I met Marcos Martinez at the TENAZ (Teatro Nacionales de Aztlan) XVI International Theatre Festival hosted by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, Texas, in November 1992, though I had read earlier of his work as an artistic director (1988-1991) for La Compañía de Teatro de Albuquerque while I was attending a two-week training seminar at the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

From our first meeting, he struck me as a spiritually intense individual, with a ferocious integrity he has not lost over the years.

At TENAZ, I observed a workshop by Marcos on the Tadashi Suzuki method of actor training (not to be confused with the Shinichi Suzuki method of music instruction). This physically rigorous method has had an impressive impact not only on modern Japanese theatre, but Western theatre as well.

Marcos is a master teacher whose workshops in the Suzuki method have taken him all across the United States as well as abroad to Mexico, Denmark, Ghana, and Russia. Additionally, he is employed as an associate professor in the Theater, Visual and Performing Arts Program at California State University, San Marcos.

Marcos took a three-week master class from Tadashi Suzuki while a student in the Professional Actor Training Program at The Julliard School in New York City. Two years later he was invited to join the International Actor Training Program in Toga, Japan, to study with the Suzuki Company of Toga



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(SCOT) that Suzuki founded and directs. The style of the company has been described in one review as elevating "sounds, movement and emotion over language." Tadashi Suzuki also serves as general artistic director of the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC) where his "concerns include the structure of a theatre group, the creation and use of theatrical space, and the overcoming of cultural and national barriers in the interest of creating work with a universal basis," according to SPAC's web site (<http://www.spac.or.jp/>).

The Suzuki method in layperson's terms is explained by Marcos as "a physical training technique intended to make the actor more scenically present; yes, this workshop will give you more stage presence. What I also tell students is that stage presence comes from real work, and in this case physical work in which they have to project their energy. The work is intended to center the body, make the actor more scenically present and interesting to watch, and increase the actor's energy level, endurance, and will." He then spoke of the "shakuhachi," a stomping exercise which is a foundation exercise for the Suzuki method.

I was interested in Marcos's stay in Japan. "My first time in Japan I was there about two months," remembers Marcos. "I hadn't been out of the country very much at that point, so I really enjoyed it. I found Mr. Suzuki to be very cordial and generous. My impression was that he liked me. Japan was fascinating and I found many things to be quite novel, given my life as an American. Throughout there was a quality, if that can serve as the word, which I found familiar, and it made me realize that in me there exists some non-Western aspect of my own cultural outlook. Perhaps it has to do with Native American influences or maybe Moorish aspects of Spanish culture, I am not sure."

"But the relationship to the earth was something that felt familiar when people spoke of the cycle of life. In particular, Suzuki was known to go off and speak at length on any number of issues which linked his work and the training to other human experiences."

Artistic impact? He answered, "Powerful effect and impact on my expectations in what I consider good theatre, has made me re-

evaluate where I am and what I am and do, both as artist and person. When I do a workshop for about a week or two I am always amazed at the extent to which people grow; and sometimes I have the impression that I am making a profound and positive change in people's lives - this is very fulfilling. I know that my work as a teacher of this method provides a forum where I ask people to address very personal issues through their work on the body within these exercises, 4) I am a better actor and director because of my involvement with Tadashi Suzuki and by teaching the Suzuki method."

Marcos's current projects include an ongoing tour of his and Cheyney Ryan's play Holy Dirt (<http://www.csusm.edu/theater/holydirt.html>) for which he is developing a sequel with the working title Green Chile Vikings. He will be teaching the Suzuki method in Mostar, Bosnia, this summer, incorporating the method into a play production of the opera "Carmen" to premiere August 2002 with the Mostar Youth Theatre.

Kat Avila (M.A., Communication) has a web site devoted to Chicano/U.S. Latino and Asian American theatre at <http://www.geocities.com/buscandocalifornia>.

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