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Instant Shakespeare: A Proven Technique for Actors Directors and Teachers

Louis Fantasia
Ivan R. Dee (May 25, 2002)
Unknown $26.00 (256pp)
978-1-56663-432-8

“We read and perform Shakespeare because, at this particular moment, this play speaks to us as no other play can or will; because we have a hunger to create and share this particular event with other human beings.” With this underlying premise, the author shares his experience, insight, and philosophy regarding the ephemeral nature of acting-creating a presence on stage that is as profound in its depth as in its practicality. The incongruous nature of the words Instant and Shakespeare make the title sound like a twenty-first century “quickie” approach to the venerable Bard. “Ay, there’s the rub!” The title belies the true nature of the lessons and ideas in this work.

Instant Shakespeare is divided into two parts: “Pre-Performance” and “Aspects of Performance” with an interlude between them that details the author’s involvement with the reconstructed Globe Theater in London. Fantasia developed his method during more than twenty years of teaching and directing at the Shakespeare Globe Centre U.S.A. His techniques are “a set of ground rules to help you get under the surface of the verse, the line, the scene, under the skin of the character.” These ground rules build on each other, much like the “Frog” overlays that Fantasia presents as an analogy of how to create “presence” through the words on the page. “Frog” refers to the plastic overlays in biology books (before the advent of computer technology) that gave a visual representation of a biological system such as the anatomy of a frog, and allowed students to see each system separately, in combination, and as a whole. Similarly, an analysis of a Shakespearean play can ultimately bring it to life, using nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, punctuation, and what Fantasia calls the “I / thou” and “I / it” relationships. Of course there is far more to his methodology, and the end result focuses on “presence” and “nominalism.”

Actors, directors, teachers-anyone with an interest in Shakespeare-will gain insight into the plays, and into acting in general, from reading this work. In addition to the text, the author’s thoughts about which Shakespearean texts are most useful and his list of sources are a great resource. It is difficult to recall the last book that offered as much as Instant Shakespeare.
(July / August 2002)

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