

Roles

Improvisationist Stephen Book
Gabriel Richard Center
January 21

reviewed by Gayle Thomas

Silence. Space pressing in on you. Heavy. No air. Can't breathe. So hard.....to move. Until Stephen Book snaps his fingers and brings you back again.

A teacher at the Julliard School of Acting in New York, he was brought to UM-Dearborn by the Cultural Events Committee to discuss and conduct a workshop in improvisation January 21.

"Improvisational Acting is where you create an entire world on stage. It is more than two actors cleverly interacting," Book told his listeners.

And the audience believed him! 25 people were suspended in space for the seven hours Mr. Book worked intimately with the group.

The speaker is a student of Viola Spolin's Theatre Game Method, which originated in the 1930's and became popular in the 50's with the advent of the first Improvisational Theatre, Ms. Spolin's "Second City." Some well-known students of this system are Shelley Berman, George Segal, Valerie Harper, and Alan Alda.

Book maintained, "The Theatre Game System is composed of acting exercises placed in game form, concentrating on different aspects of the actor's technique." Mr. Book illustrated this system by leading the group through a series of games designed to develop mind and body control, as well as concentration.

Improvisation is important because "The well-written characters (in a play) are only shells that allow for individual interpretation."

According to Book, the actor must then cultivate mannerisms and attitudes that will contribute to the total character, and convey the characterization to the audience in a realistic way.

"Good acting is, walking a tight rope. There is danger, artistic danger.

"Human beings faced with crisis, go deeper into themselves and tap an energy which normally isn't used in the course of the day."

Thus energy is an integral part of acting. Without it, there is no creative spark and the actor lacks interest and audience appeal.

Book urged the audience to take the creative risk, and throw their whole body, soul, and mind into developing a character. He stated that acting is work, as well as energy, and must be perfected over a period of time.

Moreover, he hoped that the workshop would offer an insight into the art of improvisation and provide material with which to work on.