

A collage of theater-related items including masks, a sign, and tools. At the top center is a light blue mask. Below it is a wooden sign with the title 'Theater Artists Play' and the author's name 'by Barbara L. Gregson'. To the left are brushes and a yellow cloth. To the right is a peacock feather and a red fabric. At the bottom are several colorful masks: a brown one with a feathered headdress, a purple one, a blue one, and a white one with blue eyes. A drum is also visible on the right side.

*Theater
Artists
Play*

by
Barbara L.
Gregson

A Theater Artist's Guide
to making and creating
your OWN theater work!

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CHAPTER 1

*In the Beginning...
and Today*



Chapter 1

In the Beginning... and Today

INCLUDED: Notes from a Theater Artist 30,000 years ago, Historical Notes, Theater Artist Today

Notes from a Theater Artist... 30,000 years ago

Tonight I celebrate the return of the sun and the beginning of the summer's light and warmth with my tribe. The end of winter's darkness is almost here, and I have a very important job to do. I practiced honing my skills, gaining wisdom and insight from my spirit guides and my teachers, as my apprentice has from me, and those will after him.

This is my calling! I am the shaman, chieftain, tribal leader. I am the storyteller, artist, musician, and priest. My role has been present in every tribe around the world from the beginning.

Now I sit in my sacred space preparing for my performance. I am surrounded by bison, deer and bear painted along our cave walls. They appear to be alive, running and leaping among the shadows in the flickering fire light. I smell the incense, hear the sounds of the drummers warming up outside by the great fire. Women and children are preparing the food for the festivities ahead.

I turn to my apprentice who is mixing his face paint next to me by our small fire. Soon he will become the shaman. My

time is almost over like the bear. I too will transform and become one with the Great Mother.

Facing me now, cross-legged, he closes his eyes and breathes deeply as I paint his face by the firelight. First black from a burnt stick, which I dip into the stone bowl of animal fat that has been warming by the fire. I paint a thick line across his cheeks. Now I paint under the eyes and on the nose, gray ash, then white from ground bone under eyebrows and red from ochre across his forehead, preparing him for his role as the “Great Hunter.”

He stands and helps me to rise. I need help to get up because my left leg is shriveled and weak. Once standing he gives me my staff to lean on. Then he brings me the bear fur cape and bear’s head from our sacred shelf. He places the cape around my shoulders. It is so heavy that I bend forward. I am a little old man now but breathe deeply and straighten my shoulders. This may be my final performance and I must do my best. Now he hands me the owl mask. I close my eyes and make a silent prayer to it as I place it over my head. Feathers cover my hair and head. The deer skin mask looks like an owl face with a beak and wise painted eyes.

Next, he puts on his horned headdress of the boar and around his neck, then the teeth and claw bear necklace. All he needs now is his spear and he will become the great hunter.

Our cave is empty. Our tribe is outside waiting for the story to begin. The great hunter picks up my bear’s head, his spear and helps me maneuver our way towards the cave entrance. I stop. He places the bear head on my shoulders over my owl mask and I become the bear. I stand at the doorway of the cave, growl and stretch like a bear waking up after a long winter. I begin my bear walk down to the fire and the flat rock.

The hunter helps me along the rocky path to the fire. The moon is full. The fire roaring, our tribe is sitting in a semi-circle, watching in excited anticipation as I approach. Children crouch behind their parents in fear of the bear. The drummers are silent, pausing, before we begin. All are ready to become one with the spirits and for the story to begin.

I, the Shaman, begin the drama of the rebirth of the moon, the coming of the full moon, the end of winter and the beginning of spring with slow heavy bear like movements. The drummers begin their drumming using bones and sticks. They hit the drums which are made with deerskin stretched tightly over hollowed out tree stumps. A few musicians shake their rattles made from gourds and bones with pebbles in them or play wind instruments made from bones and hallowed sticks to sound like birds. I am the bear, hungry and awakened from my winter sleep looking for food. The drummers play faster and louder as the hunter appears, stalking me, chasing me, He raises his spear. I am no longer a tired old man. I leap, crouch, then jump up and fight with the hunter. The drumming, sounds of the flutes and rattles are frenzied and furious, getting louder and faster. I'm lost in my bear part but know what to do. The great hunter, sees me, lifts his spear and kills me at the climax of the music.

Then the musicians stop as I die a good death, falling to the ground. The crowd murmurs, the fire crackles and the wind blows. As I lie there on the flat rock, the hunter bends down in front of me and swiftly takes off my bear's head and as he stands, he turns to the crowd holding the bear head high above his head triumphantly. The crowd cheers and shouts. The musicians begin to play again softly as I rise up (with the help of the hunter) and begin to fly. I am transformed into an owl. I lift my arms and fly, soaring up to the moon. The drums,

flutes and rattles start again while everyone dances and cheers. The full moon rises high above our heads. Winter's cold and darkness is banished, making way for the coming of the sun.

Historical Notes

When I was researching man's earliest art and creative expression, I came across articles in the *Smithsonian Magazine* and *The Guardian/US* about cave paintings on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia. These paintings were recently re-discovered and re-dated due to new technology. It turns out that we were making art a lot earlier than scientists and anthropologists thought and at the same time all over the world.

Smithsonian Magazine: A Journey to the Oldest Cave Paintings in the World. "The discovery in a remote part of Indonesia has scholars rethinking the origins of art—and of humanity." By Jo Marchant; *Smithsonian Magazine*; History, January 2016. - *Archeologists recently discovered cave paintings 35,000 years old in Indonesia. Animals and handprints on the walls about 5,000 years older than in Europe.*

The Guardian/US: 35,000-year-old Indonesian Cave Paintings Suggest Art Came Out of Africa. Chris Stringer, head of human origins at the Natural History Museum in London, said, "When modern humans colonized Sulawesi at least 50,000 years ago as a precursor to reaching New Guinea and Australia, they were probably already producing these kinds of depictions. I predict that even older examples of cave art will be discovered on Sulawesi, and in mainland Asia, and

ultimately in our African homeland dating to more than 60,000 years ago.” *The Guardian/US*; Science and Anthropology by Ian Sample, Oct 9, 2014.

Theater Artist Today

“Hey! Open Up!” BAAANG! BAAAAANG! The sounds of men’s fists hitting metal doors reverberated like canon blasts echoing down the sloping aisles of the cavernous auditorium/gym shaking me to my core. We were warming up for our performance to start in fifteen minutes on our so-called “stage”, a cement basketball court. The walls, from what I could see in the dim light, were a greenish gray with peeling black patches of paint on cement.

Today was our first performance in a 3,000 capacity men’s maximum-security prison, Graterford Penitentiary or SCI Graterford (Secure Correctional Institution) built in 1929.

Earlier that afternoon, we had been escorted from the prison school by the school principal down the main prison hallway. This was about a mile walk (more like running a gauntlet than a walk). The principal was a little, frail old man with a limp and a cough. He was definitely not the best bodyguard/escort but more like a tour guide, gesturing towards the different cellblocks, explaining prison procedures. As we walked quickly towards our performance space, we pushed the dolly with all of Tony’s equipment and my box of masks with my black cloak resting on top. I felt like I was in a 1930’s prison movie as we passed many classic characters, including:

1. an inmate mopping the floor in slow motion looks up and licks his lips at me then goes back to mopping the floor.

2. two inmates pushing a cart with cleaning supplies. With lascivious smile, they stop their cart in front of us, pretending it is stuck. They bow exaggeratedly before moving their cart so we can get by.
3. an inmate pretending to drop something in front of us as we walk by, all so he can look up my skirt. "No such luck mister! I would have to be out of my mind to wear a skirt in this place!" I thought as we maneuvered around him with our dolly.
4. a swarm of inmates who surrounded us when their cellblock gate opened just before we reached our destination. This was the requisite "cell block scene", when the new inmate is checked out by the current residents.

Our escort said, "Don't worry. They are just going to dinner. Just keep moving." Which of course we did, speeding up, pushing the dolly, almost running and trying not to look at anyone in the eyes. Even though we were racing past them as they walked toward us, they were able to hurl catcalls, whistles and lots of profane comments gestures at us, all in a matter of seconds.

We made it to the doors of the auditorium alive. The principal took out a huge ring of keys and unlocked the double metal doors. Sighing in relief, we pushed the dolly down the aisle of the huge gym/auditorium towards a flat performing area down below. This was to be our performance space and home for the next few hours. The principal locked the doors behind him and said, "Well that could have been worse," chuckling to himself. He then coughed, mumbled about retiring soon, proceeded to slump into in the first chair he could find, then fell asleep.

Tony was half-way through setting up his musical instruments his vibraphone and synthesizer when at 4:45 PM. the door in the farthest corner of the gym opened behind us. A man in a sweat suit with clipboard emerged. He was the gym teacher on his way out. As he was heading up the aisle, he called back to us as he took out his keys, "Gotta go! The men usually see a Friday movie. I don't know if anyone told them it was canceled." Then he unlocked the door and left slamming it shut and re-locking it behind him.

The loud noise awoke the sleeping principal. With a wheeze and a cough he said, "Well, I need to go now, too. Good luck getting inmates to sign up for the residency and we will see you next Tuesday, at 10:00 AM, assuming you get people." As he walked up the aisle, he said, "Don't forget Joseph will be here tonight to take names for you." Joseph was one of the "lifers", also known as a "trustee." He and a few other trustees ran the school and the library and administered the prison programs. We had met Joseph earlier today and he could take names of interested students, but not give us much security. He was a thirty-five year old skinny black guy who didn't lift weights, an intellectual who wanted to discuss with me the difference between mime and pantomime.

"Well at least we have the music teacher coming in and staying with us..." I said as I looked into my travel mirror, and touched up my eye makeup with my liquid eyeliner.

About 4:50 PM, we heard keys unlocking one of the four locked metal doors at the entrance of the gym. Once he relocked the door, down the aisle came the music teacher, who Tony knew slightly. He was supposed to stay, introduce us to the audience, help us if we needed it, etc. So we greeted him like a long lost son with a hug and said, "*Thank you for coming! Everyone else left but you are here...and...*"

He said, “I just want to check on you both and make sure you are all set. I can’t stay. Sorry guys. I have a last minute gig with my band and have to go. You know how it is. But listen if anything happens, see that door over there?” He pointed to the door where the gym teacher came from way in the back of the gym. “If anything happens, just go in that door, you can lock it behind you. You’ll be safe there and wait until someone comes to let you out.” Tony said, “What about my equipment?”

He said, “Well, you’ll just have to leave it. Don’t worry. Nothing is going to happen! I’ll make sure the door is unlocked,” which he proceeded to do. “Well good night and have a good show. I hope you get lots of guys that want to work with you.”

The banging on the doors started at 5:10 PM, when the men began to congregate outside, twenty minutes before our show was supposed to start.

I put on my black cloak amidst the noise, trying to prepare for my performance. I was focusing on our opening piece and what we were going to do in fifteen minutes. I stretched, ran in place in slow motion and looked at the seating area in front of me. There were two aisles between the folding chairs ending up at the entrance – those four ominous locked metal doors. The windows on the doors were barred. I could barely see the shadows of the men and guards through the dingy windows, though I could hear their shouting and banging from the hallway.

The men yelled as they pummeled the doors, “Let us in! Open up! It’s time for our movie! Open the f.... doors! It’s Movie Night!”

Tony, musician and partner in our company, *Mimsik*, was finishing setting up. When we heard the shouted words, "This is our movie night!" we both looked at each other with a mix of horror and desperation.

"**Great!**" I shouted desperately above the din, "What are we going to do?" Tony, shrugged, shook his head, swore and plugged in his electric keyboard/synthesizer, picked two mallets in each hand and started to play his vibraphone. Nothing was going to stop him from warming up before a performance. Without missing a beat he said, "We do what we always do! Play!"

"I know! I will but... what if they don't like it?" I shouted and picked up my masks that I would be wearing in our show starting in about five minutes. Obviously, no one bothered to tell the men that "Movie Night" was canceled, I thought to myself.

And then it occurred to me, my new goal tonight was **not** to start a prison riot and **not** to be trampled in the process. Besides that challenge, we had to entertain and inspire our audience in order to keep our job and be paid. This was not just a one-night gig but also the beginning of a very lucrative twelve-day theater and music residency. Tonight was our first day of the residency and we had to recruit twelve to twenty men to sign up and participate in our theater and music residency. The men who signed up to work with us were to write and perform an original show, accompanied by live music. Tony would form a band that would compose and play their original music for the show. I would teach mime and acting techniques and write an original show with the men. On the twelfth day of the residency, they would perform the show for their fellow inmates. This whole process would take place over two months. So, our introductory performance tonight had

to be successful. If they didn't like our performance or started a riot or didn't want to create their own show, then we were out of job and/or dead.

I looked up at the old cracked wall clock with five minutes 'til show time at 5:30 PM. Soon I would walk up the aisle and gesture through the barred windows to the guards in the hallway, to open the doors. Then what? What would happen when one hundred to two hundred huge black and white pissed off men, in great shape (from lifting weights for years) came streaming down the aisles? What would happen when they realized there was no movie, just the two of us without any guard or person of authority to calm the crowd.

Now show time! Tony stopped playing the vibes, looked at the clock, 5:30 PM. He said, "We'll do what we always do in the beginning of our kids show."

"Yes!" I said. I took a deep breath and said, "*Let's do it!*" Then I began to cover my head with my first mask attached to a black, close fitting hood. The feeling of the first mask was innocence, which was a painted child's face on a papier-mâché mask. Next mask was angry, sad, happy and lastly the largest mask, wisdom. Each mask fit into the one above it. They went in size from the smallest mask - innocence - to the largest - wisdom.

Tony turned on the synthesizer and started to play the rich soothing sounds of violins. He then played the vibraphone with the bell like sounds, accompanying the violins and orchestra.

The music lifted me up and out of this damp dark scary place, I was the wise old man now in a long black cloak walking up the aisle "in-character." I gestured to the guards through the window, to open the doors.

I stepped back half way down the aisle as the doors opened and the men poured through. They were greeted by a wise old man with a large gray, papier-mâché face. He wore a black cloak, which covered his body with only his hands showing.

The first two men greeted me at the top of the aisle with “Where’s our movie and what the f...?!”

They looked like giants in the lights towering above me at the top of the aisle. They stopped in their tracks, amazed and surprised when they saw the wise old man and musician down below playing soothing music. I opened a mime door for them and bowed to welcome them into the space. Scowls turned to smiles as they went through the door then I ushered them down the aisle to their seats.

I began to play as I do for every kids’ show we have ever done. I always start my show by improvising with the audience. When two or three of the inmates came down the aisle, I opened imaginary doors for them. I gave them programs or took their tickets, brought them popcorn or hot dogs, set up obstacles that they had to climb over or around. I improvised mime illusions with the audience, going up and down the two main aisles until everyone came in.

The audience laughed at me and at each other playing along. Our opening worked. This funny old wise man in a long black cloak along with the beautiful soothing music played by Tony created an otherworldly atmosphere. We created an atmosphere of peace, magic, mystery, comedy and beauty, which made the rest of the show fun and easy for us to perform.

Once the audience was seated and the guards had shut the doors, I came down center stage and began the rest of our piece. Tony kept playing as I removed each *feelings* mask.

Underneath the wisdom mask, was happiness. The music changed for each emotion. Next was sadness, anger and innocence. At the end, I took off the innocence mask/hood turning my back to the audience to do this, then turned to face the audience and bowed.

After introductions, I asked if anyone would like to wear one of the *feelings* masks.

“You must show the feeling with your body and you cannot speak as the mask covers your mouth.” We had several volunteers, one man I remember said, “This is how this place makes me feel” and put on the sad mask. He showed the feeling very poignantly by slowly falling down into a kneeling position. Then he raised his arms up and looked up to the ceiling.

Joseph, the trustee, signed up about twenty-three men that night - eight musicians for the band and fifteen for the theater group. They were amazing students, writers, musicians and performers. Their show for the prison population was a huge success.

Needless to say, what we did and how we did it worked. Tony and I survived what could have been a disastrous experience. The Japanese folktale, *The Musician and the Pirates* is a similar message. A fisherman on his boat is hijacked by a group of pirates. He is also a musician and plays the violin beautifully and passionately. He survives, being robbed and killed by seducing them, lulling them into a

peaceful state of mind by his playing. They leave him and his boat unharmed.

**AUTHOR NOTE: I called Tony while writing this chapter, this summer 2017, about our Graterford experience, which would have been 30 years ago when we talked. I wanted to know what he remembered and his feelings about that night and the residency. Tony performs, teaches, and plays all over the world. He said he never witnessed or experienced anything like it any time or in any other place in the world and it was the "most scary and enlightening performance of my life." I agree.*

We are in a time once again where our need for the arts is growing more and more apparent. Controversy and anger and fear seem to swirl around us these days in large supply. This has happened plenty of times in our history. We have needed and sought the healing and teaching power of the arts for a long time, perhaps forever."

- Robert Lynch
President and CEO
Americans for the Arts

CHAPTER 3

Start Digging
&
Find Your Story

The atoms of our bodies are traceable to stars that manufactured them in their cores and exploded these enriched ingredients across our galaxy, billions of years ago. For this reason, we are biologically connected to every other living thing in the world. We are chemically connected to all molecules on Earth. And we are atomically connected to all atoms in the universe. We are not figuratively, but literally stardust.

- Neil deGrasse Tyson

Chapter 3

Start Digging! & Find Your Story!

INCLUDED: World Story Wheel, Your Story Wheel, Hero - Heroine Journey Table

The World Story Wheel and Your Story Wheel on the following pages will help you find a story, idea, and/or themes to create your theater piece or show.

The oldest dramas enacted in every culture are creation/birth, initiation and death/resurrection. They are found in the quest (a monomyth) also known as the Hero's/Heroine's Journey made famous by author Joseph Campbell's book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

The *Hero - Heroine Journey* table in this chapter shows a 12-step outline of the journey designed by Christopher Vogler based on Joseph Campbell's book. Ancient legends, films, plays and literature retell this storyline (e.g., *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings* and Homer's *Odyssey*).

The three act dramatic structure outline on the *Hero - Heroine Journey* table shows you where and when the 12 steps of the typically appear in a three act-play or film.

* *Find a similar quest story with the dramatic elements and make it into a 10-minute theater piece.*

World Story Wheel



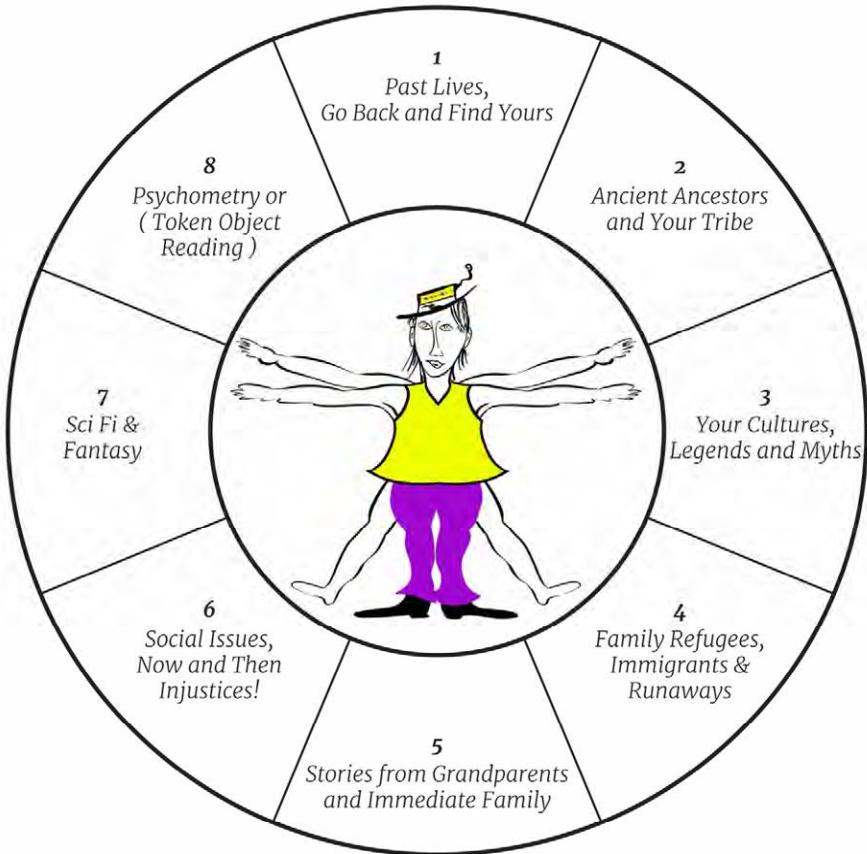
Past, Present and Future

World Story Wheel (*Past Present and Future*). Discover stories, ideas, history and themes to help you create your theater piece and show.

Start Digging!

- 1. Earliest Human Art:** *Recently, anthropologists found proof that humans were making art a lot earlier than they thought and in every part of the world - as early as 60,000 years ago. Research what they made (cave art, musical instruments, masks and sculptures).*
- 2. Ancient Dramas:** *Three major dramas were enacted and played in every culture around the world: birth/creation, initiation and death/resurrection.*
- 3. Ancient Civilizations:** *Egypt, Greece, Rome, China and Africa.*
- 4. World Leaders/Thinkers:** *Ancient and today. chieftains, kings, queens, gurus, artists, saints, scientists, etc.*
- 5. Theater In History:** *Research different styles of performing. Don't forget art and music history.*
- 6. The World's Future:** *Science, life style, and technology, new discoveries and disasters.*
- 7. Ancient Myths and Legends:** *Every culture has them.*
- 8. Folk Tales and Fairy Tales from Around the World:** *Pick a country or culture.*

Your Story Wheel



Past, Present and Future

Your Story Wheel (*Past, Present and Future*) is designed to help you create your theater piece and show by finding ideas, stories, history and characters from your ancient past and into the future.

Who are you? Who were you? Who will you be?

- 1. Past Lives, Go Back and Find Yours:** *Find new characters and periods in history. Relive it. Go to Chapter 6 “Finding a Past Life”*
- 2. Your Ancient Ancestors and Tribes:** *What does your DNA tell you? For example, go to ancestry.com or 23andme.com and find out. Go way back!*
- 3. Our Cultures and Tribes, Myths and Legends, Fairy Tales and Folk Tales**
- 4. Family Refugees, Immigrants and Runaways:** *Where did they come from? Where did they go? Where are they now?*
- 5. Stories from Grandparents and Your Immediate Family**
- 6. Social Issues Now and Then! Injustices!** *Your message and unique viewpoint.*
- 7. The Future, Yours:** *Your life in 10, 50, 100 years. Sci-fi and fantasy.*
- 8. Psychometry or (Token Object Reading):** *Find characters and stories from an object, (go to Chapter 6 “Psychometry or Token Object Reading”).*

Plot & Narrative	Hero - Heroine Journey
ACT I	Ordinary World
Inciting Incident	Call to Adventure
	Refusal of the Call
	Meeting with the Mentor
ACT II	Crossing the First Threshold
Conflict	Tests, Allies, Enemies
Rising Action	Approach
Climax	Ordeal
	Reward
ACT III	The Road Back
Falling Action to Conclusion	Resurrection
	Return with Elixir
End: To the Ordinary World; Transformed	

CHAPTER 7

About Mime

Mime is *MAXIMUM* idea,
MINIMUM movement.

- Ella Jaroszewicz

Chapter 7

About Mime

INCLUDED: Mime the Universal Language, Getting Started, Rehearsal Space Supplies and Tools that You Will Need, About Mime, [What] Mime is not, [What] Mimes are, do and can, Different Styles of Mime

Mime - the Universal Language

During Nero's reign (63 BC) in Rome, an ambassador from another country was visiting. While watching a mime performance with Nero, the ambassador asked if he could have the mime as a gift to take back to his country. When Nero asked why, the ambassador replied that his country was surrounded by aliens and barbarians, all speaking different languages and none of whom could understand each other. "But this mime, whose gestures are a universal language, can make himself understood by any nation" (adapted from *On Pantomime* by Lucian 2 AD and from *The Mime Book* by Claude Kipnis).

Mime is a mainly a silent language. A universal language. Our first language. (See Chapter 1, *In the Beginning and Today*). It is just as relevant today and useful as it was thousands of years ago.

With any language, there are different dialects and accents just as there are different styles of mime employing different techniques, methods and tools. Many of these go way back to ancient Greek, Egyptian and Roman theater and were passed

down to me through my master artist, mime, acting and mask making teachers, who learned them from their teachers and so on. I am honored to continue this ancient practice of learning and teaching, passing on these methods and tools to my students in my classes and now to you, through this book.

Many of the great master artist mime and acting teachers of the 20th century have died, but their schools and pedagogy continue today. There are schools and teachers all over the world with a direct link to our ancient theater roots. And so this training can be passed on to you.

So, keep this tradition alive and find a mime or theater artist or school to learn from. ASAP! Studying with a **real live artist is the best! See the **Resources** for information about mime and acting training and schools in Chapter 12: Collaborations – Learn – Share.*

Getting Started

Here's the good news, you don't need a lot of supplies or a large studio space to learn, practice mime and create a mime piece. You do need:

- to use your imagination.
- an idea or story that has meaning and is important for you to develop into a mime piece, then share it.
- the desire to learn the art, language of mime. Learn some classic techniques then develop your own style, your own dialect.
- a flexible body. This is optimal, *but I have worked with people who had a disability, were paralyzed and could only move their upper body, arms, hands, and head. They actually did excellent mime. Doing mime requires isolating parts of your body and expressing your idea with economy of movement.*

Rehearsal Space Supplies and Tools that You Will Need

- ***Most Important Supply!** *Buy, borrow or steal a full-length mirror and use it!*
- **A small rehearsal space is a good thing!** Having a small rehearsal space is a good training for all your theater work. It teaches you to think about the movement in your mind, to visualize it and to economize your movements. As long as you have a mirror and a small floor space in front of the mirror you can practice mime. Later, when rehearsing with others, you may need a larger space (see Chapter 12, *Collaboration*).
- **Masks:** Buy an inexpensive neutral, white plastic mask to use in rehearsal. Practice with it when you want to watch your movements in the mirror. Alternatively, use a brown paper bag and cut out eyes so you can practice with your face covered. You will notice your body and movements better. See more on using masks in Chapter 9.
- **Wear neutral flexible clothes** (i.e., dance clothes, leggings, etc.) *Do not wear* T-shirts with logos and busy patterns when practicing or performing. They are too distracting. *Do not wear* a black top. It's too hard to see the articulation of the chest movements.

About Mime

Mime is, “Maximum Idea and Minimum Movement” and “All Art Is Rhythm.” Both are quotes by Ella Jaroszewicz, mime, director and teacher. See **Resources** for more information about mime schools and teachers.

“Maximum Idea and Minimum Movement” means, mime is like writing poetry vs. writing prose. When writing poetry, we try to use as few words as possible, packed with feeling and meaning. The same applies when doing mime. When creating and performing mime we only move when there is a reason to move and when you do, each movement should have meaning.

If you can express your idea with your hand, eyes, a nod of the head, a gesture, that's mime.

Less is More!

“All Art Is Rhythm.” Rhythm is all-important, when creating and performing mime. Changing the rhythm of the movements throughout your piece is what makes it dynamic.

How do you do that? Begin by thinking about the sound of the movement. Say it in your mind then out loud while you are doing the movement.

When make the sound effects out loud the rhythm of the movement will come naturally.

Example 1 - Watching a butterfly: Imagine a butterfly fluttering gently in front of you. Think of a light high sound in your mind, say it out loud, like a clicking sound with your tongue, click, click and make little staccato movements with your head as you are watching it, fly in front of you. It stops and lands on a flower. You stop, then move again as it flies up and goes off. Follow it with your head and eyes as it flies away. That's it. *You just did Mime!*

Example 2 - Lifting a heavy trunk: Now try to lift something heavy, like a trunk. Bend down. Hold on either side, the handles of the trunk. Think of heavy sounds in your mind.

Breathe. Put your whole body into it. Lift it up to your knees and lean back. Make a deep guttural sound in your mind. Make the sound effect of the movement of lifting the trunk, first in your mind and then out loud.

Adding Music (Later): Once you have the movements of the piece figured out and each movement is clear and has the appropriate sound and rhythms then add music (see Chapter 12, *Collaborations – Learn – Share*).

Adding Text (Later): Don't pretend to speak and mouth the words. Basically, think of the movements with rhythm and the language of mime/movements to tell your story. Add words if you need to. See *Who Speaks?* in *The Actor as Theater Artist*, Chapter 10.

Mime Is Not:

- acting without words. It is its own language, a style of movement.
- mimicry or imitation. It is beneficial for an actor and mime to be a good imitator and observer of people's movements and voices, etc., but copying someone alone is not mime.
- movement for movement's sake.
(I often have trouble watching Modern Dance. For example, I start wondering where are the dancers going and why?)
- limited to one style of mime or that you must copy someone else's style.
- limited to one style of makeup or costume (worn before or made famous by someone else).

Mimes Are, Do and Can:

- Mimes do and can wear neutral makeup, or character makeup, or use masks. Whatever fits with your character, style and show. I repeat: *You do not need to wear white face makeup to do mime or wear black or anyone else's costume!*
- Mimes are playwrights (without words) and the choreographer of their own creations.
- Mimes create an imaginary world outside themselves as well as an inner imaginary world. The audience is required to imagine the mime's world and to go inside their world.
- Mimes adapt pre-written stories for their work. Example: our mime/theater piece is based on the myth *Pandora's Box*.
- Mimes can perform alone or with a group of other mimes, actors, dancers, musicians, etc. Many are theater artists (like me) and use significant amounts of mime technique in their work

Different Styles of Mime

There are many styles of mime, just like acting styles, which come from different periods in history and cultures. There is a big difference between acting in film and TV versus indoor or outdoor stages/spaces. The same applies to mime. Below is a list of the different genres and styles of mime.

- Clowns: silent clowns with or without “white face” make up, clowns and buffoons that speak and use physical comedy and slapstick, they perform solo shows and in circuses and in the theater.
- Mask and mime theater

- Shadow theater
- Puppet theater
- Magic theater (magicians using mime and theater techniques)
- Commedia dell'arte (masks, mime and acting)
- Movement theater companies combine all the above.
- Mime companies: (classical mime and pantomime) can combine all of the above.
- Solo performers: mimes, actors, comedians, magicians, storytellers, clowns, dancers, performance artists and theater artists

*Go on to Chapter 8, *Mime - The Practice*, and begin to improvise and learn mime. Next, make up your own style of mime. Then with the passion and tradition of our theater artist ancestors, play and pass it on.

CHAPTER 9

Masks

*“Unmask Your
Creative Self!”*





Chapter 9

Masks

Wear a mask and unmask your creative self.

- Barbara Gregson

INCLUDED: About Masks, Performing and Rehearsing with Theater Masks, Performing with a Theater Mask is Liberating, The Practice - Getting Started, Masks for *Pandora's Box*

About Masks

Masks have been worn by shamans, priests, priestesses, dancers, mimes, actors, musicians, artists, theater artists and the storytellers of their day for thousands of years. They were worn in sacred ceremonies, rituals and in performances around the fire, on the village square, in amphitheaters, parades, pageants and in theaters of all sizes and cultures. Masks have been worn since humans started to make art 35,000-50,000 years ago.

Cave paintings depicting dancers and hunters, wearing headdresses and animal masks (antelope, deer, bear) were painted by early artists on the cave walls throughout Europe. Recently, new underground caves with cave paintings were discovered in Indonesia dating from 35,000 years ago. See Chapter 1, *In the Beginning...and Today*, for more details.

Now anthropologists and scientists believe and can prove we were making art a lot earlier than they had previously thought. *And* they realize that early man, wherever he lived, was making art at the same time!

Most of the animal masks depicted on the cave walls worn by our ancestral theater artists have not survived, since they were made of natural materials (resin, wood, hides, fur and grasses, etc.)

The oldest surviving mask is in a museum in Paris, France (Muse Bible et Terre Sainte). It is a stone mask from the pre-ceramic Neolithic period. It dates from 7000 BC.

Many of the mask making and mask performing techniques come from ancient Asian, Greek, Egyptian and Roman theater. These mask making and mask performance techniques were passed down to me from my master artist-teachers who learned them from their teachers who learned them from their teachers, and so on. I now pass these mask making and performance techniques, methods and knowledge on to my students in workshops, residencies and through this book

*See **Resources** and **Bibliography** for references where you can learn how to make masks (schools, artists and books, etc.)

Performing and Rehearsing with Theater Masks

Dos and Don'ts

- Theater Masks are *not* made to hang on a wall or to casually wear it around the house. They are **not** Halloween masks.
- When rehearsing or teaching a mask class, take off the mask when you need to talk or break character. Stop. Take it off. Then put it on again when you are ready to become the character again.
- Theater masks were worn to connect with spirit of the animal, character, the feeling, etc., for thousands of

years. Keep this same awareness when wearing a mask. You are entering the spirit of the character.

- Theater masks are made to be worn by performers, actors and mimes on indoor and outdoor theater stages and in all types of performance settings and spaces.
- A theater mask by itself is not an illusion. It's just an object. Only when it is worn by the actor/mime will it create an illusion. The actor/mime brings it to life through movement and skill. *If you just put a mask on and stand there, your audience will lose interest.*
- Don't break the illusion! Don't break character!
- Never take off your mask in the middle of a performance unless you want to break the illusion and talk to the audience as yourself or another character.
- Don't turn away from the audience or show your back to the audience if wearing a mask unless you want to disappear. See Chapter 8, *Mime: The Practice*, for illusions and turns.
- *Remember when making a theater mask:* Masks must be light, comfortable and breathable (since you may be wearing one for hours). That is why the base is usually made out of porous material such as fabric, paper, paper mâché or leather.

Performing with a Mask is Liberating!

Performing with a full-face mask requires you to cover your face, except for holes made in the mask for your eyes and nostrils so you can see and breathe. Your mouth is covered so you cannot use your voice. Your face is also covered so you cannot use facial expressions.

This can be *very* liberating for the actor/mime. When you are wearing a full-face mask, you do not have to worry about

how you look, your makeup, your hair, how you sound, your voice or your lines (you don't have any)! Less is more and by wearing a mask, you actually *unmask your creative self*. By limiting the choices you have to express yourself, you actually can concentrate on showing a feeling in new ways by isolating and using other parts of your body. When your face is covered with a theater mask you are no longer "chained to your face." You are free to find new ways of expression.

For example, try this improvisation:

1. without a mask
2. with a neutral mask

Imagine someone you love is walking away, in the distance, along the horizon, from right to left. Now concentrate on showing "sadness" with your arm and hand then fingers, waving to the person you love who is going away. Move your head from right to left as you are watching them walk across the horizon. Once they have gone, breathe, sigh use your chest, to show the feeling,

**We show many feelings with our chest, because that is where the heart is and where we breathe and sigh. Breathe in and out, slowly moving your chest forward, back, or inward.*

MASKS



Character



Neutral



Neutral/
Character

CHAPTER 10

The Actor as Theater Artist

The actor has to develop his body. The actor has to work on his voice. But the most important thing the actor has to work on is his mind.

- *Stella Adler*

Chapter 10

The Actor as Theater Artist

INCLUDED: Getting Started, Performing Live Theater and Art of Improvisation, My Character Process, Voice Exercises, Who Speaks? How to Write Great Dialogue

To repeat my favorite definition of “**theater**” (noted previously at the end of Chapter 2), “*theater*” means to me “a seeing place” where you “behold the spectacle.”

And who is playing, making that spectacle happen that the audience is beholding? It is **The Actor!**

Definitions of “Actor”:

1. one who represents a character in a dramatic stage production, film or television (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
2. theatrical player (dictionary.com)

The Actor as theater artist is an artist that works “in a place to behold” figuratively and literally. The actor as a theater artist is not only “representing a character on stage” or film, but so much more. An actor can also be the artist and create and make his/her own original performance material, whatever theatrical form that may take. The actor can be the director, writer, set and costume designer, mask maker and performer. The actor can be a **Theater Artist**, (the main character of this book)!

In this chapter, we will concentrate on the most important elements of acting that you will need to know to write and perform your own material. You will need to know how to:

- improvise.
- use your voice.
- develop a character and play the character.
- choose who speaks, who doesn't and how.
- write text and dialogue, etc.

Getting Started!

*Go to the **Mime** chapters (Chapters 7 and 8) for more information. The same "Getting Started" rules from **Mime** apply to **Acting**

- Practicing and rehearsing: Use a mirror!
- Learn to rehearse in a small space. This will force you to use your imagination and to your visualization skills.
- Visualizing the scene and your actions will help you memorize the scene, movements and your lines (see *Visualizations* in Chapter 6).
- When you have learned to rehearse in a small space, you will be able to rehearse anywhere, as long as you can concentrate and are not interrupted.
- When collaborating with other performers, you can determine who has the largest space and has the most convenient location.

Performing Live Theater and the Art of Improvisation - *Where Anything Can Happen!*

Stage acting is a very different style of acting than acting for TV and film. In *Theater Artists Play*, we are concentrating on live theater acting for all types of stages and performance spaces, indoors and outdoors, traditional and nontraditional, in fact, *anywhere that you have a live audience*.

So learning and performing live theater requires learning how to improvise. It is a crucial skill to learn and is the key to your success and confidence as an actor, mime, performer or for anyone who plays live!!

“Improvise” means:

- to execute or arrange anything extemporaneously (*www.dictionary.com*).
- to compose, play, recite (music, verse, etc.) on the spur of the moment (*www.dictionary.com*).

Learn and practice improvising with:

- your fellow performers on stage.
- with the audience.

Your theater work may include audience participation as part of your show.

The more you work at improvisation the better you'll get.

So plan and rehearse the piece accordingly but be prepared for whatever is different at that moment.

**Playing live on stage is always risky, nebulous and ever-changing. Anything can happen and often does.*

Improvisations as a writing tool: Improvisations can give you the base, the idea for a scene in your story or a stand-alone play or short theater or mime piece. Throughout *Theater Artists Play* we are building *Pandora's Box* scenes from improvisations (see *Theater Artists Today*, Chapter 14).

Other Important Considerations When Performing Live!

- **Pick the appropriate theater piece and style of acting** for where and who your audience is.

- **Can the audience hear and understand you?** You may or may not have a microphone. So learn to project your voice. If you are going to speak on stage then you need good diction and you need to project (see *Voice Exercise* in this chapter).
- **Can the audience see you and *understand the story, the idea and what you are doing*?** Is what you are doing, coming across the footlights to the audience? Can they see your movements, your face or your mask clearly? Can they understand what you are doing? Are they engaged and interested in what you are doing?

When Performing Outdoors and in Nontraditional Performing Spaces such as:

- street theater and “strolling,” moving from one location to another, in character, performing along the way and stopping, gathering a crowd, then moving on.
- on a float in a parade, pageant, (see *Mime Techniques: Tableaux* in Chapter 8).
- in a park.
- playing in all types of settings for Fringe Theater Festivals, i.e., train stations, town squares, malls, etc. You need to be able to be seen clearly and for people to get it immediately.
- in a prison auditorium/basketball court (see Chapter 1, *In the Beginning...and Today*) with terrible acoustics and a volatile audience.
- on a school stage, gym or multi-purpose room.
- *or anywhere where you do not have the perfect stage (which will be where you play most of the time)!*

I recommend using:

- costumes (larger than life), masks, props, puppets and or a moveable set. If you group of more than one

performer, your look should be visually strong, with cohesive costumes in the same style (see Chapter 11, *Sets, Props & Costumes*).

- minimum words such as nonverbal theater, mime and physical theater.

**AUTHOR NOTE: I wouldn't perform Shakespeare or a 3-act play outside unless on a stage with good technical support (lights, sound, etc.) I might condense the play into a 15-minute mime-music-mask piece with a minimum amount of words.*

My Character Process

Developing a Character: My approach to acting, developing and discovering a character is to first find the character's physical traits and rhythm. I choose an element for my character, i.e., water, earth, air or fire. Then I find the character's animal (see *Mime*, Chapters 7 and 8 for more on character development).

For example:

- Pandora is air and a deer.
- Zeus is fire and a lion.
- Prometheus is earth and a bulldog.

Now discover your character's voice: The voice should match the element, the animal or it could be the opposite, which is unexpected (now you are writing comedy).

For example:

- Zeus is a lion can have a lions voice or the opposite, the mighty god of all gods could have a soft or high pitched voice or accent (a mouse's voice, not a lion's).

Find similes and metaphors to help define your character further.

For example: What color would your character be if he or she were a color (not skin color but personality)?

What kind of:

- weather?
- car, house, boat?
- fashion, jewelry?
- flower, tree?

Make up your own metaphors and similes.

Take a *Pandora's Box* character and list all of the above metaphors and similes and build your character study.

“Day in the Life” character improvisation exercises:

1. **Visualize the day** in the life of your character from morning ‘til night. Try this exercise with one of the *Pandora's Box* characters. Go through their day in your mind, without moving. Lie on the floor or sit in a comfortable chair. Go to *Visualizations*, Chapter 6, to review. Visualize your character while they are:
 - sleeping, getting up, eating breakfast.
 - going to work, at work, being with coworkers, interacting throughout the day with people. Arguments? Hard work or easy? Happy? Angry? Sad?
 - coming home, eating dinner going to bed, etc. Are they alone? Lonely? Content? Tired?
2. **Act out the day** in the life of your character.
 - Get up. Walk about your space. Imagine you are in his or her world.

- Use mime and your voice, have imaginary conversations with others at work, coming home to your family, etc. Move through your day.

After completing Exercises 1 and 2 (above):

- **Write** or record the character traits that you discovered, their history, daily life and their feelings about their life, etc.
- **Draw** a picture of your character with your costume and mask ideas. How will you represent your character on stage?

Try these exercises with the characters Pandora and Zeus from *Pandora's Box*:

- Pandora waking up, living at Prometheus' house, working in the Making Shop, interacting with Prometheus and Epimetheus.
- Zeus on Mount Olympus trying to run the world of gods and humans (having a bad day!)

Now add the character's lines and write the script.

Once I have decided that my character will speak and after developing the character, I improvise the scenes from the story that I want to show/tell. I then write the character's lines, dialogues, the script (see *Dialogue* in next section).

AUTHOR'S NOTE: It is easier to know your character if you have written and created your own script, either from a myth like **Pandora's Box, or writing original material. You will know his/her history, feelings and motivations and will be able to improvise any scene or situation your character is in. If anything happens on stage, you will know all there is to know about who you are, what you are doing and why. You will be prepared and will be able to stay in character at all times.*

Voice Exercises - *Projection and Diction with Feeling!*

This is my favorite and most fun voice exercise. I have used this during rehearsals and workshops with other performers and students.

You should have at least one person to listen to you and coach you. We will call them the “Director” and you the “Actor.” Change the roles if you are with a group so everyone has a chance to play both roles.

- The actor stands center stage.
- The director stands across the room from the actor, as far back as they can go, i.e., to the back of the auditorium or rehearsal space.
- You, the actor, recites a nursery rhyme, song or poem by heart. Speak it, don’t sing it. *Mary Had a Little Lamb* or *Jack and Jill* are good ones to use.
- It can be short **but it is crucial** that you know the words so you don’t have to think about them and can focus on how to say them with feeling and expression and to speak the words clearly. You need to concentrate on your, diction and projecting her voice. Do not worry or think about gestures or the movement. Stand in one place and concentrate on your voice.
- The director asks the actor to recite their piece in many different ways listed below:
 - ◆ **Whisper.** You are telling a very important secret to the director. The director should hear every word, even at the back of the auditorium.
 - ◆ **Tell a joke.** You start to tell the joke but start laughing before you tell the punchline. The director should hear each word clearly even when you are laughing.

- ◆ **Make an apology.** You are really sorry for something that you did and it's really difficult to apologize.
- ◆ **Express different feelings** reciting your piece such as anger sadness, surprise, jealousy, love and in situations such as a marriage proposal, having to give someone bad news, being afraid of something, etc.

Who Speaks?

When writing your story for the stage and writing a script, you must figure out which of your characters will speak, which will not and HOW!

A common storytelling technique is to create a **Narrator**. The narrator can be:

- **a character** from the story who steps out of their role and talks to the audience, giving their opinion about someone or events in the past, future and present. They become the storyteller at different times.
- **a storyteller** who tells the story's past and future events. He/she tells the story to the audience. This is their only role.
- **a Greek chorus**. This is a group of actors or singers speaking in unison at times, telling the events of the story and warning the characters of future events. They can also sing or chant.

Other characters may have a monologue in which they speak their thoughts:

- to the audience.
- to another character who is on or off stage.

OR

Two or more characters may speak dialogue:

- to each other.
- to the audience.
- to a character off stage.

Who speaks in *Pandora's Box*? For example, the narrator can be:

- any character such as a god or goddess.
- Pandora as an old woman looking back at what happened.
- a Greek chorus comprised of the gods and goddesses warning the audience of what could happen and warning Pandora “Don’t open the box.” They could whisper in unison throughout the show, as well as introduce everyone (see Chapter 14, *Theater Artists Today – Scene Synopsis for Pandora’s Box*, for more speaking ideas).

How to Write Great Dialogue

Dialogue for 2 actor/writers:

- Supplies needed are paper, pencils and a magazine.
- Together the actor/writers look through the magazine to find an interesting action photo with two or more characters doing something that both think would make a good conversation/dialogue.
- Each actor/writer identifies themselves, for example, as A or B and writes A B A B A B, etc., down the paper leaving space for the dialogue of two characters in the photo that they chose.
- Next to each letter (A or B), they write “1 word” to “5 words” (max) to randomly assign the number of words for each

line of dialogue. For example:

- A. 1 word
- B. 2 words
- A. 3 words
- B. 5 words
- A. 1 word, and so on.

They continue to the bottom of the page, writing “1 word” to “5 words” (max), varying the number of words to produce an interesting rhythm to the dialogue.

- The actor/writers write the lines A or B would say looking at the photo and only using the number of words allocated for each line. Together, they write each line then read it out loud. If in a group, each pair of actor/writers show their photo to the others and read their script in front of the whole group.

Pandora’s Box, Scene 1 (example dialogue between Zeus and Hephaestus): Zeus calls Hephaestus on the phone to ask him to make a new human for him (a woman) in order to trick Prometheus and his brother. In this example, we are using Z and H instead of A and B.

- Z. 1 word Hello
- H. 1 word Zeus?
- Z. 5 words Make me a new human
- H, 2 words A what?
- Z. 3 words You heard me.
- H. 4 words Out of metal? Clay?
- And so on.

*Move on to the next chapter, *Sets, Props & Costumes*.

Theater Artists Play

WHERE: Anywhere

WHEN: Soon

CALLING all would-be, used-to-be and wanna-be actors, mimes, storytellers, dancers, musicians, writers, all visual and performing artists!

DON'T WAIT to be Discovered!
DISCOVER YOURSELF with
Theater Artists Play.

LEARN how to show your stories,
make and play your own creations
and get paid!

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