



# Lessac NEWS

January, 1982, Newsletter No. 16, Department of Theatre, University of Minnesota, Duluth

## Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Merely setting down "Season's Greetings" seems more and more like a conditioned use of "word-symbols" often only partially or sparsely filled with vital meaning; so, may I, in the spirit and with all the implicit hopes of the Hannukah and Christmas holidays, wish all of you

A VERY, VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR!

... and, would that the quintessence of these combined celebrations could freshly ignite this year's "season's greetings" with the lambent flame of a creative gut-feeling that will fill these oft-used half empty "word-symbols: to overbrimming, and hopefully foment and inspire a passionate fundamental need for real peace, health, wisdom, and art—in our time, and in this world.

I am once again writing to share with you some information and thoughts regarding:  
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This is the first time I communicate with you as Emeritus Professor. It is a warm title and I like it; but it also serves to remind me of what needs to be done. Interestingly enough, it is easier to ponder these questions as Emeritus, than it is as Professor.

The decade of the 80's is in many ways a crucial period. For our society as a whole, whether in economics, politics, education, art, or religion, it is a decade of re-examination, re-appraisal, and re-discovery.

The disciplines of communication skills, health arts, human ecology, and the performing arts, will not escape this scrutiny, and the Lessac work which is involved with, and related to all of these important areas, must likewise monitor itself as it grows, changes, innovates, and matures.

As Emeritus, it feels good to be able to look back and ahead in one swoop. It feels good to re-examine the 'foundation' of the Lessac training and be reassured that, up to this point, it measures up significantly as a creative resource and as a body energy process. It feels good to know that, rather than habit-controlled exercises, drills, routines, and other technical contrivances or expedients, our "resource and process" represents a "fertility field"—a "womb" that accommodates the drama of: conception, gestation, birth and discovery, along with the promising prospect in the ensuing growth and development, of exposing and generating some of the "natural miracles" of the evolving person.

For the artist-performer particularly, and the rest of society generally, such tapping of the body's "natural miracles" will help reveal the organic sense-perception and pleasure-reinforcement of varying life-building tools and instruments, i.e., vocal beauty and dynamics, body expressiveness, melody, harmony, rhythm, grace, buoyancy, radiancy, potency, curiosity, spontaneity, imagery, spirit, instinct, and humor-sensing. From there it is but a springy step to the wonders and mysteries of: personal creativity, personal inventiveness, personal art, personal skills, personal health and esthetics, personal religion, personal culture. I use the term 'personal' advisedly; these virtues, to be truly personal, must be truly gut-felt; it is the way one learns to cope rather than capitulate. After all, is not the "collective community culture" but the sum total of its individual "personal cultures"?

As an Emeritus looking ahead, it is good to point out that from the very outset the Lessac philosophy and investigations dealt, potentially, with considerably more than intensive training for actors, singers, speakers, and treatment for clinical patients. Equally significant today is the intrinsic relationship of Lessac research to: the ecology of the human organism; the extension and expansion of psycho-physical health cycles; learning how to restore and preserve the 'natural miracles' inherent in body esthetics and body energy states; and, learning how to link these within the ongoing process of education, maturation, talent involvement, and the art of 'growing young'. Such training concepts revolve primarily around "the use of self" or self-training; it is training that must serve the needs of people in all walks of life, functioning off-stage as well as on-stage.

On-stage or off-stage, different people use different "beacons" to illuminate their creativity, behavior and progress.

The performer's "beacon" may be, acting is: believing or deceiving, or invading, or pervading, or pretending, or realistic behaving, or entertaining. The off-stage individual's "beacon" may be, living is: dignity, or honor, or power, or survival, or comfort, or success, or *making* a living.

But 'off' or 'on', and regardless of which "beacon", it is the "use of self" that does the job; and no matter the stage, to use the "self" with impunity in its multiplicity of applications, means that one must fully understand body dynamics and body wisdom and, at least sub-consciously, follow the standard that signals: "most health", "most esthetic", "(most) optimal", "most exciting", "most energizing", "most relaxing", "most rewarding", "most human". Democratic procedures do not guarantee creativity, and artistry, and natural skills on-stage.

Because our work addresses, and is in turn addressed by these vital factors, we must stand ready to join with all others who are genuinely interested, not only in the 'natural miracles' of body wisdom as they relate to training in the theatre arts, vocal arts, circus and body arts, or in the discipline of human body-ecology, but also, with those who are exploring the 'natural miracles' of cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary synergism and synesthesia.

As Emeritus Professor, I am dedicated to pursue these ideas and developments ever more deeply, ever more efficiently, ever more effectively.

ARTHUR LESSAC



# workshop '82



*"I am gratified to announce that for the third year in a row we have been invited to hold our major summer workshop program at UMD and I am delighted to accept. Below is all the information including a message from Janis Myer, Professor of actor-training at UMD, who takes over from Rick Graves as coordinator of the workshop. I shall once again supervise the program and teach at least for the first week. I strongly urge any of you planning to attend to register early. I see our 1982 UMD Summer Workshop as a reinvested beginning of things to come in the decade of the 80's."*

Arthur Lessac

*"The University of Minnesota, Duluth (UMD) is very pleased to once again host the Lessac Summer Workshop. The Lessac method is a strong bond to personal creativity widely used by performers and educators, and implemented across the country by more than 150 professional theatre companies and schools.*

*The Lessac Summer Workshop in Duluth has been a huge success; the feedback from the workshop participants of the past two years has been extremely positive. Many of the participants continue the work in other part of the country.*

*Former Summer Workshop participants include: an Oscar-nominated actor, a leading star of the Metropolitan Opera, a TV series star, and a renowned professional therapist.*

*The UMD Theatre Department extends a warm invitation to theatre practitioners to join us for an intensive and exciting six weeks in Duluth this summer working on releasing the body and the voice through the highly acclaimed Lessac method. I look forward to hearing from you."*

Janis Myer

## The Workshop

The 1982 workshop at the University of Minnesota, Duluth (UMD) will be held JUNE 21 through JULY 30, at the same facility as last year, Duluth's Endion School, a brisk walk from the UMD campus.

The Lessac Workshop will occupy the newer portion of the building, which houses six large classrooms, a small lecture/theatre hall, a gym and a kitchen.

Housing for the workshop will be in the three-bedroom Stadium Apartments on campus.

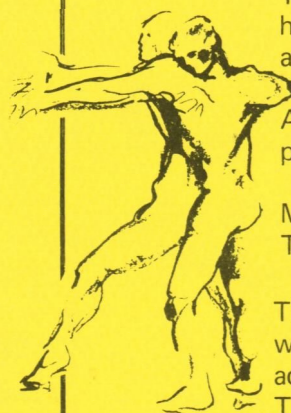
Staff for the '82 Lessac Summer Workshop include Arthur Lessac, program supervisor and guest teacher, Sue Ann Park, program director, Lisbeth Roman, associate in charge of voice, Richard Cuyler, associate in charge of body work, William Burnett, and Sandra Lane Daniels, who joins the teaching staff this year.

The cost of the workshop is \$850, which covers tuition, fees for health service and facility use, housing, and recreation. College credit at both the undergraduate and graduate level will also be available.

As space is limited persons wishing to attend the workshop are requested to register as soon as possible.

More information regarding the workshop is available by writing to Janis Myer, Department of Theatre, University of Minnesota, Duluth, Duluth, Minnesota, 55812, or by calling (218) 726-8562.

The Duluth campus of the University of Minnesota is ideally situated for summer study: days are warm but never hot, and nights are cool. Located on a slope overlooking Lake Superior, the 247-acre campus provides a view of the busy Duluth-Superior harbor, with ships from all over the world. The vast lake country surrounding Duluth offers myriad opportunities for students and their families to enjoy outdoor activities.



## The Conference

As implied in my opening statement, it seems highly appropriate that a gathering of the large network of teachers, advanced students, artists, friends and other professionals, who have incorporated, to whatever degree, the Lessac work into their activities, take place some time in 1982.

It will be our first official conclave, affording us the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to this most timely and essential program of evaluation, self-examination, updating and creative dialogue.

I visualize this as, at least, a three day working conference. The agenda would include, among other things: a "bringing up to date" forum led by myself and others, concerning the present state of the work and its future directions; open discussion sessions on the methods, principles and problems in teaching the system; an investigative session on developing an integral and integrated acting program; and several mini-workshop refresher courses.

The need for feedback from the field is great. Shall we organize this conference immediately before, or after the New York ATA convention in August? Or perhaps shoot for a December date either in NYC, Chicago or Cleveland? Ought we to charge a registration fee to help defray expenses? What fee would be a reasonable one? What other vital items should be included in the conference program?

If you are interested in attending such a program, desire to take a role in its planning, or care to offer your thoughts, please contact: Rob Davis, coordinator  
The Lessac Conference  
2001 Orrington Avenue  
Evanston, Illinois 60201  
Phone: (312) 866-8463

The dream of an Institute devoted to body and voice work is still alive. The project planners say the road is still open, but due to retrenchment and Reaganomics the going is slow. This dream is too important to let go, and the planners urge any interested persons with suggestions or advice to contact Janis Myer.

## The Book

DBS release of the first edition of BODY WISDOM. While the official publication date is January 29, DBS is now filling back orders. BODY WISDOM is available in cloth (\$16.95) and paper (\$12.50). This first edition contains many changes over the limited preliminary printing late in 1978. It is re-edited, corrected, visually and textually re-ordered, and somewhat revised. The text has a most attractive cover designed by Elaine Golt Gongora. By the way, DBS is moving and from about the first of the year its address will be: 821 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003. Telephone: (212) 228-3400.

We are reprinting Robert Barton's review of the preliminary printing, published by the ATA in its Theatre Journal of May, 1980.

**BODY WISDOM: THE USE AND TRAINING OF THE HUMAN BODY.** By Arthur Lessac. New York; Drama Book Specialists, 1978; pp. viii + 314. \$12.50 paper.

It has been nearly nineteen years since the first appearance of Arthur Lessac's *The Use and Training of the Human Voice*. The publication of this companion volume is likely to be welcomed by those who have mastered the Lessac System, those who have simply struggled with it, and even those who have avoided it. The new book clarifies, focuses, expands, and illuminates the older one. It is what the author calls an "umbrella" for the original and will probably be widely employed as an introduction to The System.

In 1960 the idea of listening to one's "interior network" and taking a Gestalt approach to voice production was revolutionary, but both the human potential movement and the emergence of systems theory research have occurred in the past two decades. Lessac is able to draw on a far broader base of support for his second major work, including eight years of workshop testing to crystalize and verify his concepts. How do the two books differ? The new one is considerably shorter, simpler, and less dependent on guidance from a Lessac-licensed instructor for total comprehension and appreciation. This is partly due to excellent illustrations which are lavish, striking, and clear. Approximately half of each page is devoted to line drawings which excel in communicating both body movements and sensations.

In spite of the title, the reader should not expect a movement-only work any more than the original confined itself to voice. The Lessac System involves total integration of the two areas, the *Body Wisdom* devotes considerable space to sound production and "vocal life." It is not really an acting textbook, even though Lessac's precepts are probably employed by performers more than any other single group. Unlike the earlier work's considerable actor focus (including a forty page script exploration), this book is designed for anyone involved in intense physical activity and addresses itself at least as often to the needs of the athlete as the actor. There are no scene work guidelines and, with the exception of a breathing technique section, no suggestions of dramatic contexts. Not an anthology from which exercises can be drawn at random *Body Wisdom's* program depends strongly on sequence for success. The workshop activities are aptly labeled experiments rather than exercises.

*Body Wisdom* addresses *initial* stages of actor training: tension, control, centering, focus, and balance between energy and relaxation which are goals of non-actors as well. Lessac bases this work on the concept of a natural "curvo-linear" body state, free of any straight lines and on an assumption that the physical self is happiest in "balanced muscle-tonicity" or active resting. Seven basic energy states are identified: in addition to the three vocal actions (structural, tonal and consonant, all carryovers from the original book), energy is perceived as drawn from conditions of buoyancy (oxygen), radiancy (impulse), potency (chemical-muscle), and inter-involvement (emotion). Once power sources are identified, the body is explored as a compact ball, small sphere, expanded sphere, lying crescent, standing crescent, upright figure, explorer of personal space, and finally seeker of a perpetually moving, changing self-image. Unfamiliar terminology is fully explained in the text, and the author has a particular gift for evocative imagery: "Think of your personal space as a globe and of yourself as a live flame inside the globe that cannot be extinguished."

Unlike a number of "body books," *Wisdom* does not often force the reader to learn detailed, complex and unfamiliar movement patterns, but rather draws on common experience. Exercises (sit-ups, leg raises, jumping rope, push-ups) and natural psycho-physical "healers" (laughter, crying, singing), examined from new illuminating perspectives, dominate the book. One performs life-long activities with a newfound sense of dimension.

Much of this valuable volume's emphasis is on "unlearning bad habits". Lessac's goal is reclaiming the body's natural genius now that we exist in an environment that engenders inhibitions and mannerisms and that no longer demands complete health from the human instrument. Images of children and kittens permeate the text, but not from a naively nostalgic perspective. Lessac's aim is to help the individual, in his own words, "to be able to fall like a child, without falling as often as a child"

Robert Barton  
University of Maryland

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