

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Alison Jeffers

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Ethan Mordden

Anything Goes:

a History of American Musical Theater

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 360 p.

£16.99.

ISBN: 978-0-19-022793-7.

Few historians of the Broadway musical are as prolific as Ethan Mordden. His early histories of the genre (which include individual volumes for each decade from the 1920s through the 1970s) occupy nearly an entire shelf in my personal library. Although other critics sometimes find fault with Mordden for making the occasional, usually inconsequential, factual error, his reputation as a witty and accessible writer is well-deserved and not at all diminished by his latest contribution.

This book is full of Mordden's trademark witticisms (*'The Prince of Pilsen was so rife with cliché it was as if the public domain had written an operetta'*), and it freshens up lengthy discussions of dusty works with references to more recent popular culture (describing Irving Berlin's 'Washington Square Dance' as 'celebrating the odd little wind instrument that later became so strategic in the *Legend of Zelda* video games, "*The Ocarina*"). Nevertheless, when read from cover to cover the book also suffers from the tedium that plagues most detailed histories of an ephemeral art form.

Mordden does his best to make a catalogue of all-but-forgotten musicals interesting, but ultimately never manages to overcome the significant difficulty of writing engagingly about the importance of productions that now exist as little more than faded newspaper reviews and unpublished scripts few have ever read.

Anything Goes condenses Mordden's earlier histories into one volume and moves the boundaries both back from 1920 to 1866 and ahead a decade past the ending of his 2004 volume – *The Happiest Corpse I've Ever Seen: the Last Twenty-Five Years of the Broadway Musical*.

Still, this is familiar and somewhat redundant ground for Mordden to tread. Perhaps the attention given to Larry Stempel's *Showtime: a History of the Broadway Musical Theater* may have prompted him to offer a competitor, and it is, admittedly, a worthy one. However, I find the most interesting portion of this volume to be in the appended bibliography and discography. Though the font size shrinks a bit, his history of histories (and recordings) is contiguous with the rest of the book

and full of the mordant Morddenisms that make it a welcome addition to this author's already full library shelf.

DOUG RESIDE

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John Gillett and Christina Gutekunst

Voice into Acting: Integrating Voice and the Stanislavski Approach

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014.

384 p. £16.99.

ISBN: 978-1-408-18356-4.

With so many books about vocal technique for performers available this is a unique and intense resource that provides much more – almost a drama school training in book form. *Voice into Acting* is an inspiring, comprehensive, and accessible guide to voice training, acting techniques, and body awareness for actors and performers. With exercises that explore physicality, posture, and use of breath and voice alongside those associated with traditional actor training, it seeks to be an integrated resource that places an informed vocal technique at the heart of an actor's process of textual analysis.

This it certainly does, combining technical and colloquial language and cultural references that make it accessible and relatable. Dany Heck's illustrations are wonderful – informative without being incomprehensible – and support the practical demystification of technique and process that runs through the text. A noticeable and likeable element is Gillett and Gutekunst's generosity in citing influences taken not only from established practitioners but also from colleagues and former students.

As suggested by the title, Stanislavski's work forms the springboard for many of the ideas in the book, but the authors also draw moments of stimulus from a wide variety of other theatre and performance practitioners, including Meisner, Hagen, Grotowski, Laban, and Steiner, to clarify and extend their exercises and concepts. This, coupled with examples from a varied and considered collection of texts, broadens the work, creating access points for experienced performers while still being presented simply and logically.

Although the book doesn't require the reader to have a specific familiarity with actor training techniques, at times the volume of information can seem overwhelmingly dense. The accumulated use of symbols to link ideas could perhaps

be confusing, but if worked through methodically creates an integrated and memorable resource for both teaching and practice.

Gillett and Gutekunst have created a detailed portfolio of practical strategies to develop specific and transferable skills in all areas of training, rehearsal, and preparation for performance. *Voice into Acting* empowers performers by informing and encouraging them – suggesting analysis of text, character, and physicality that can be explored practically as an individual as well as part of an ensemble rehearsal process. It is a rich resource for teachers and students, and for established actors wishing to refresh or revisit their training or get out of bad habits it is excellent: a challenging and insightfully presented series of methodologies that demands an intellectual, instinctive, and physical understanding of the acting process.

NAOMI PAXTON

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Roberta Carreri, trans. and ed. Frank Camilleri

**On Training and Performance:
Traces of an Odin Actress**

Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. 232 p. £26.99.
ISBN: 978-1-138-78000-2.

The long-awaited English translation of Roberta Carreri's book has finally arrived and is well worth the wait. Originally published in Italian in 2006 as a documentation of her work demonstration, training, teaching methodology, and performances, this edition contains additional material with Carreri's perspective on Odin Teatret's recent performance work together with autobiographical material that post-dates the original.

One striking feature of the book is its refusal to be the documentation of a system or a 'how to' manual. However, it is an undeclared 'why to' testimony on destiny. Unlike many books on performance training, it intertwines process-driven creation with the inextricable lived life of an actor.

Following her first encounter with Odin as a young student spectator in 1974, Carreri was compelled to tread the Odin way. This personal compulsion is tangible on every page and is bound to resonate with emerging and experienced performers who choose to live the work they make. Carreri charts her course through her own and the life of a theatre company that has defied extinction by shape-shifting its presence through a relentless fifty-year existence. Claiming to be the last actor trained personally by Barba, Carreri provides an interesting insight into the director-actor relationship and in particular the contradictory controlled autonomy that auto-didactic training reveals.

Carreri divides her work into three parts. First is the story of her training and creative endeav-

ours from 1974 to 2010, beautifully illustrated with photographs. This is followed by a verbatim documentation of her workshop *The Dance of Intentions*: initiation training she offers students wishing to learn the Odin way practically. This is possibly the nearest the book comes to offering 'how to' exercises, from which Carreri thankfully retreats.

The volume is delightfully readable and highly accessible, offering the student and teacher 'bite sized' chapters that combine the value of a working diary generously shared anecdotally, technically, and pictorially, with a rich global depiction of Carreri's training and performance life journey from incompetent novice to master of her craft. There is enough juice in the biographical detail and poetic form to keep you feasting in one sitting. Additionally there are four supplementary fragments buttressing her writing which all allude to the action of writing as an actor.

Her lucid introduction and Barba's distinctive epistolary preface frame the beginning. Rietti's looping note on theory and practice in relation to Carreri's work demonstration and Taviani's extensive poetically academic epilogue conclude the work. Life-cycle imagery pervades throughout, and one senses not sacrifice to a life in theatre, but a compulsion to do what is necessary in living out a destiny of action.

CARRAN WATERFIELD

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Janet Clare

**Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing,
and Competition in Renaissance Theatre**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
305 p. £65.

ISBN: 978-1-107-04003-8.

This sensible and readable book should be useful to the student or general reader who wants to see Shakespeare in the context of the theatre of his own time. Janet Clare argues persuasively that Elizabethan and Jacobean stage traffic was not one-way, from Shakespeare to lesser imitators. Looking at dramaturgy rather than literary quality, she shows that many features considered unique to Shakespeare are in fact present in the plays that he adapted.

It's George Peele, now accepted as the author of *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, who made Philip Faulconbridge a major character, though Shakespeare expanded his comic and choric possibilities. It's the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III* that first emphasizes Lord Stanley's role in Richard's defeat, something that has been taken to show Shakespeare's relationship with the Stanley family. George Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* exploits the emotional two-person scene that is so crucial in *Measure for Measure*. Less