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Guide to the

The Actor is the theatre : a collection of Michael Chekhov's unpublished notes and manuscripts on the art of acting and the theatre: typescript

1977

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Summary

Creator: Prey, Deirdre Hurst du, 1906-

Title: The Actor is the theatre : a collection of Michael Chekhov's unpublished notes and manuscripts on the art of acting and the theatre: typescript

Date: 1977

Size: 1.5 linear feet; 3 boxes

Source: typescript: Gift, Du Prey, Pierre, 04/01/2002

Abstract: Michael Chekhov was an actor, director, author, and teacher, whose theories on acting and directing continue to be influential. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Aug. 29, 1891, Michael Chekhov was the nephew of author and playwright Anton Chekhov. He showed early promise as an actor, and in 1912 he was invited by Constantin Stanislavsky to join the Moscow Art Theatre. After sixteen years with the group, during which he worked as both an actor and director, Chekhov left Russia and worked in Germany, France, Latvia, and Lithuania. In 1935 at the invitation of actress Beatrice Straight, Chekhov established the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington Hall in Devonshire, England, assisted by Deirdre Hurst du Prey, an acting student who helped him learn English. In 1939 the war forced the studio to move overseas to Ridgefield, Connecticut. The group eventually disbanded in 1942, when many of its actors were drafted into the armed forces. Chekhov moved to California and continued to teach, lecture, and act in motion pictures such as Alfred Hitchcock's *SPELLBOUND* (1945), *ABIE'S IRISH ROSE* (1946), and *RHAPSODY* (1954). He wrote a book *TO THE ACTOR: ON THE TECHNIQUE OF ACTING*, later revised. Michael Chekhov died on Sep. 30, 1955, in Beverly Hills, California, at the age of 64. In 1962 *MICHAEL CHEKHOV'S TO THE DIRECTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT* was published, based on lecture notes. Deirdre Hurst du Prey edited two additional books based on his ideas. Consists of thirty-two folders of typescript, compiled by Deirdre Hurst du Prey from notes taken between 1936 and 1942, during the active years of the Chekhov Theatre Studio in Devonshire, England, and in Ridgefield, Connecticut. According to Deirdre Hurst du Prey, her record of Michael Chekhov's discussions of acting technique is verbatim and unabridged, and reflects the evolution of his ideas in light of the Studio's theater experiments and productions. A few emendations have been made by hand. Mrs. du Prey's notes served as the basis for Michael Chekhov's book *TO THE ACTOR* which he completed in 1942. This book was first published in the 1950s in a heavily edited edition, then in a more comprehensive edition in 1991. The source material was copyrighted in 1977. In the Appendices are several related items, including a photocopy of a 1948 letter of reference written by Michael Chekhov on behalf of

Deirdre Hurst du Prey, a copy of a 1969 letter to Deirdre Hurst du Prey from Michael Chekhov's widow Xenia, two typescript memoirs of Michael Chekhov, each five pages, written in 1976 by Beatrice Straight and Deirdre Hurst du Prey, a 1926 essay by Chekhov entitled "The Path of the Actor" translated from the original Russian into English in 1936, the transcript of an interview with Deirdre Hurst du Prey conducted in spring 1999 when she was 93 years old, and other documents pertaining to Michael Chekhov and his studio classes.

Preferred citation: The Actor is the theatre : a collection of Michael Chekhov's unpublished notes and manuscripts on the art of acting and the theatre: typescript, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

Creator History

Michael Chekhov was an actor, director, author, and teacher, whose theories on acting and directing continue to be influential. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Aug. 29, 1891, Michael Chekhov was the nephew of author and playwright Anton Chekhov. He showed early promise as an actor, and in 1912 he was invited by Constantin Stanislavsky to join the Moscow Art Theatre. After sixteen years with the group, during which he worked as both an actor and director, Chekhov left Russia and worked in Germany, France, Latvia, and Lithuania. In 1935 at the invitation of actress Beatrice Straight, Chekhov established the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington Hall in Devonshire, England, assisted by Deirdre Hurst du Prey, an acting student who helped him learn English. In 1939 the war forced the studio to move overseas to Ridgefield, Connecticut. The group eventually disbanded in 1942, when many of its actors were drafted into the armed forces. Chekhov moved to California and continued to teach, lecture, and act in motion pictures such as Alfred Hitchcock's *SPELLBOUND* (1945), *ABIE'S IRISH ROSE* (1946), and *RHAPSODY* (1954). He wrote a book *TO THE ACTOR: ON THE TECHNIQUE OF ACTING*, later revised. Michael Chekhov died on Sep. 30, 1955, in Beverly Hills, California, at the age of 64. In 1962 *MICHAEL CHEKHOV'S TO THE DIRECTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT* was published, based on lecture notes. Deirdre Hurst du Prey edited two additional books based on his ideas.

Scope and Content Note

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Key Terms

Subjects

Acting -- Study and teaching

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Typescripts

Names

Prey, Deirdre Hurst du, 1906-

Chekhov, Michael, 1891-1955

Straight, Beatrice

Dartington Hall (Totnes, England). Arts Centre. Chekhov Theatre Studio