

Volume 2.0



Training Manual
for
Christian Drama Ministry

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The worldwide instructional training manual for Christian drama



Assisting in Christian Drama Ministry Worldwide

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The Butterfly—a symbol of new life. As a gift to you, with all orders for DramaShare materials, we enclose the DramaShare Butterfly. Until her passing in her 98th year, these butterflies were lovingly hand-made by “The Butterfly Lady”, and the tradition continues.

New—Volume 2.0



The *DramaClub* Training Manual has been an outstanding success, being actively used for over 6 years in training Christian dramatic arts ministries in 42 countries around the world. Since it's first printing in 1994 we have received many good reports on this manual, as well as suggestions for improvements. The result is *DramaClub* Training Manual 2.0.

In addition to a section on Directing, (including excellent material written by Karen Dickson and Mike Wagman), and also a Mime tutorial written by Tim & Tanya Chartier, we have updated all parts of the new manual.

Our prayer is that God will use this information to His glory in locations throughout the world, and that through the Christian dramatic arts ministries which rise up that His name will be glorified.

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We appreciate your feedback as to improvements which you would like to see in future upgrades.

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On Being an Actor

Drama Club® 2.0

by

DramaShare®

Christian Drama Ministry Training Program

On Being An Actor Section

Edition 2.0

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On Being An Actor

In this section we will be concentrating on acting. All involved in drama, on both sides of the footlights, need to have a firm understanding of what goes

into being an actor. It is impossible to be a good writer or soundroom manager or lighting technician or any other part of the drama team if you don't understand the problems and challenges which the actor faces. For this reason, in *DramaShare's DramaClub* we insist that everyone try their hand at acting. You may even find that you come to enjoy acting, but whether this does or does not happen, you will end up much more proficient in your function if you have "walked in the actor's shoes". As a bonus you will become much more lenient when things go wrong, having experienced first hand that the job isn't all that simple. (Note - we do the same thing when we come to technical training. Actors are expected to learn writing, lighting, and all other skills in order to understand the problems and challenges faced in those areas).

In this section we will get a first-hand knowledge of the challenges and problems which the actor faces. We will study character interpretation, stage movement, learning to use your voice and your body in concert to project a



believable image, memorization and much more.

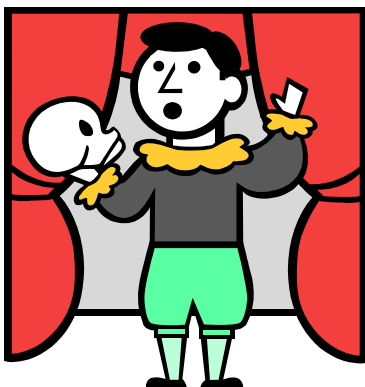
What's Acting All About?

For centuries people have loved to act and it is an interest which is shared by young and old alike. Children like to dramatize the life which they see around them. Adults enjoy games of

charades. Even those who would never dream of acting in public enjoy dressing up for costume parties; this is really a form of acting. The reason for this infatuation with acting is that it allows us to assume new personalities. Think about times when you have been telling about an experience which you have had. At some point in the re-telling you likely imitated something of what someone did or how someone talked. In that situation you were an actor playing a role. You had to think of how that person talked, what their mannerisms were, how they walked, their body language, etc.

In approaching an acting role you are doing the very same thing. You think through how that person would likely act, talk, walk, react and relate. Would that person be loud, quiet, outgoing, introverted, boisterous or serene? After fixing those characteristics in your mind, next ensure that the verbal and non-verbal messages which you are sending out are consistent with the characteristics.

Use your imagination. Try to feel the emotions of the character which you are



portraying. How would that person likely talk? How walk? You will gradually gain skill in expressing emotions effectively with your voice and with your body. Each time you work through these emotions you will find it easier to create different kinds of characters.

Visualize in minute detail the person whose character you are assuming:

- age
- size
- health
- clothing
- movements
- temperament
- interests
- aspirations
- background
- family
- status
- economic position



What we are attempting to provide to the amateur actor through DramaClub is nothing new. It is the same goals which were identified almost one hundred years ago by Constantin Stanislavski of the Moscow Art Theatre. In his "Method" he identified two criteria:

- to enable to create a truthful character portrayal, and,

- to enable to interpret his character in relationship to the other characters in the drama.

“The Method” became a kind of guideline or blueprint in guiding the actor in using his own emotional and intellectual resources to achieve all of which he is capable in Christian drama. This is not an easy task as it takes a great deal of hard work and commitment to succeed. While it is well beyond the scope of DramaClub to go into the Stanislavski Method, he had an interesting and relevant concept which we call the *Method's "if" Principle*:

The actor must ask himself what he would do if the events in the drama were actually happening and he was involved in them.

We like the fact that this personalizes the characterization of the role and allows the actor to gain a thorough understanding of the inner nature of the character. Based on this knowledge and understanding all details as to voice and bodily actions will be determined. We firmly believe that in Christian drama, while the director has a definite coaching role to play, the first right of characterization belongs to the individual actor. The actor must communicate the role to the audience as truthfully and as effectively as possible, and this can only happen when and if the actor performs "*created reality*". How does one go about learning to be an actor?

A good way to learn to act is to read scripts which portray situations having very strong emotions and to attend performances where this type of emotion is acted out. Notice how people with strong feelings express themselves

convincingly. Note how their voices and actions are in concert. The voice and the audience must be telling the same story since otherwise the audience would be lost.

When attacking a new character, the first thing you want to do is to "meet" the character. Get to know him or her. The way to do this is to read the entire script several times out loud. Move around as much as you wish, let your face and your body react as you feel would be appropriate, try to sound as much like your character as you possibly can. Try to avoid making a definite assessment of the character until you have read the script through at least once. Only at that time can we start to "put meat on the bones".

The Five Building Blocks of Characterization

Usually in church drama a session starts off by handing out scripts, assigning parts and then immediately beginning

rehearsals. This method will virtually never produce a Christian Drama Ministry of which to be proud. As you will see, the speaking is the last of the steps we need to go through. In preparing for a role in drama there are five words and concepts which you need

to think of and to keep foremost in your mind:

- **think**
- **see**
- **feel**
- **move**
- **speak**

No one could possibly give their best performance without using these five Building Blocks. We will look at each one separately:

Think

As you read through a script, do you understand "every" word in the entire script? Pay particular attention to the lines which your character speaks since for the character will reveal clues about himself in his speech and actions. But, no, don't simply stick to your own speaking lines, review the whole script! You should understand what others are saying in order to fully comprehend how your portion fits into the overall presentation. If you aren't thoroughly at ease with absolutely every word you will, in your delivery or in your mind, stumble over this part of your lines on performance day. Or you won't thoroughly understand just how the dynamics of your character interplays with others. So get out your dictionary and get digging! On your next run-through, keep this thought in your mind:

"What am I saying?"

In every line think:



What are the important words?

Try emphasizing the important words and minimizing those words which are not as important.

Put words together in phrases or thought patterns. Break each sentence up in this way and actually mark and underline the words in your script so as to know how best to handle each sentence:

Forward marched the fearful foe.

Breaking up longer sentences into **thought patterns and phrases** is vital since you must think through at what point in the sentence you will pause for breath. Many amateurs pause for breath at that point when it is necessary, with no regard for how this affects the meaning of the sentence. Realize that you will break the thought pattern of the listener if you pause in the middle of a sentence. Go through your script, reading it out loud, and pencil in the points in each sentence at which you will pause for breath. Ensure that each "***breath segment***" is not too long, since on performance night the increased adrenalin will place additional demands on you. Remember that by taking a breath between thought patterns you can use this short pause to clarify, rather than confuse, the meaning of your character in the mind of the audience. Ensure that you are proceeding sufficiently slowly through your spoken lines to enable yourself to make every thought clear, don't rush through your lines! Remember again that performance day



jitters will cause you to speed up your delivery – **slow down!**

See

Imagine exactly who and what your character is: what do you wear, how do you look, how do you move, etc? As you read the script try to think of a person who you know who reminds you most closely of this character. Close your eyes and see this person in the role which you are about to portray.

Depending on situations, you might even be able to go to that person and ask them if they could speak and act through the lines to give you some indication of how they might be handled.

If the setting of the drama is an unfamiliar one, study the locale and the period. Try your local library, they will have information regarding the geographical and cultural aspects of the area. If it is a foreign land try to visit with some natives of that area.

As soon as you can, visualize who your character is, how they talk, walk, think and act. From this point you will begin to work out the specific ways in which you will clarify this character to your audience.

There are conflicting opinions as to the value of viewing movies or stage productions of those who have performed the character which you will play. While there can be benefits gained, the fear is that an amateur actor may try to emulate the characterization of the actor rather than to develop his own characterization. Such a characterization will seldom be successful, particularly from an amateur actor.

Feel

This is where you develop total empathy with the character you will portray. You want to totally take on the emotions of the character.

- what kind of person are you,
- why do you behave as you do,
- how did you get into the situation in which you now find yourself,
- how good is your social adjustment,
- are you shy, inhibited, outgoing, intelligent,
- what do you want, what stands in your way of achieving these goals,
- what do the other characters say about you,
- what might have happened in your childhood for you to act and think as you do,
- in what way has your environment affected you,
- what are your problems,
- are you meeting or evading your responsibilities,
- have you developed a defense mechanism which allows you to evade issues,
- are you cynical, aggressive, tense, arrogant, friendly, talkative, introspective, idealistic, shy, fearful, envious, charming,
- how would you react to stress and tensions,
- what emotions have you personally experienced which can bring keys to your stage character,
- what is your mood, why are you feeling that way,
- does the mood change at any point during the script? If so, when and why?

- what is the new mood? How might this mood be portrayed?
- what impact does your character's emotions have on others in the script,
- understand the social and personal background of your character.

Try to understand all the emotions which the character has at each point. Also understand these feelings in relation to the other characters. Work by yourself to imagine situations in which you can see your character. Feel the emotions. What can you do to maintain the continuity of thought and feeling throughout the drama?



Move:

As you read, (and re-read), the script, think of:

- what movements would be natural and likely for your character,
- what impact does the movement of your character have on the other characters involved.
- is there anything unique about your character's actions,
- is there a master gesture, a distinctive action which can be repeated effectively to provide a further clue to your character,

(walk, shrug, habit, positioning of feet)

Ensure that your character is not overshadowing others.

Speak:

Now, finally we are at the point where we are ready to think of rehearsals. It is

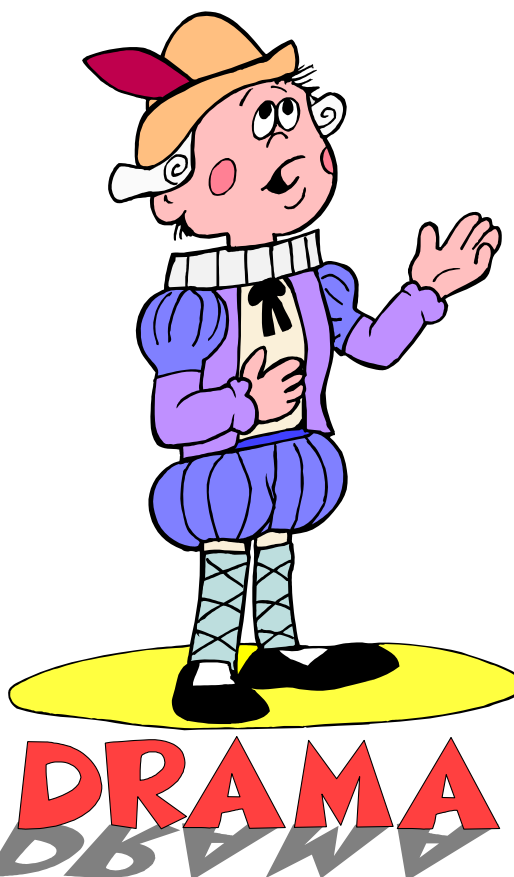


only after you have attacked a character from the standpoint of thinking out the meaning of the words, visualizing the character, how do you speak, do you have polished diction, understanding the emotional dynamics and getting a read on the movements that you are in a position to start thinking of speaking out the words. The important point is that now, having done your character homework, you will find that you will speak effectively.

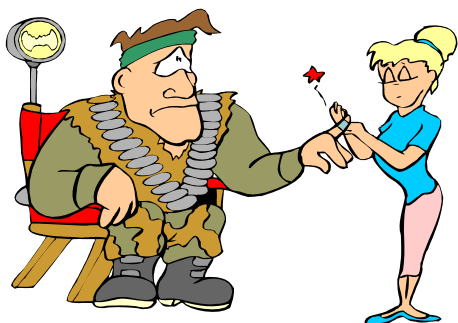
- feel the emotions of your character,

- how do these emotions help in developing the proper voice for the part,
- let your voice react naturally to your emotions as you read your lines,
- be totally open as to response; it may be to laugh, cry, or whisper,
- let your voice be natural, colorful, spontaneous.

Often it will be almost eerie to notice how your voice will automatically move to the correct tone, volume and inflexion. Characterization which you would have found almost impossible to attain by moving directly to rehearsal will become not only much easier, but make your drama experience infinitely more enjoyable.



Roles

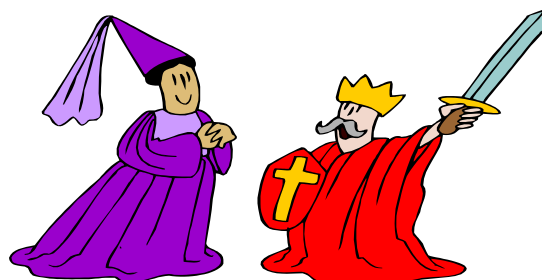


There are many egos bruised because of the labels of **leading** versus **supporting** roles. At *DramaClub* we have a different way of looking at this role assignment. We believe that, essentially, the leading actor is that person who is performing lines at a particular point in a drama. The supporting actors are all of those to whom the lines are being delivered. The thought behind this is that it is the duty and responsibility of all actors to "support" and never detract from the person who is delivering a line. This is true whether that particular actor has only one word to speak or whether s/he has half the lines in the script. Regardless of this, obviously there will usually be some of the actors in a drama who will have a more focused role, one which is normally longer and which may carry the major message or theme of the drama.

The fact is that supporting roles normally offer the greatest opportunity for displaying dramatic ability and versatility since these are roles which normally provide the greatest difficulty. Aspiring actors are wise to seek out a role which is totally opposite from their own character since this develops versatility. In *DramaClub* we try hard to ensure that all actors alternate between leading and supporting roles.

Rehearsals

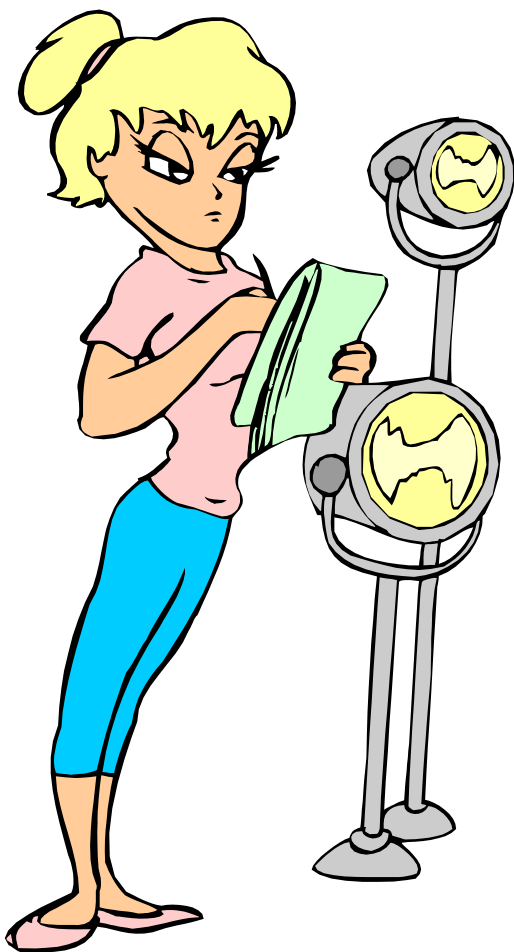
We hear from others as to how rehearsals are a hassle and that no one wants to show up. Our experience in *DramaClub* is quite the opposite. We have excellent attendance for rehearsals and there is an excellent camaraderie. It is your duty as an actor to develop the discipline and commitment to attend, mentally as well as physically. Be on time and stay until the end of the rehearsal. If you will be unable to attend, inform the director at least 24 hours in advance. Along with your body and a willing and open mind, bring your script, *DramaClub* binder, notebook and pencil. Make note of all changes, stage directions, crosses, gestures, cues, prop cues, director's suggestions. Your thoughts are important to the group and should be quietly brought forth. However there are few things as unsettling as a cast or crew member who constantly has a comment to make on every aspect of the production. Two critical attributes of a good actor are spontaneity and freshness of approach. These attributes must come with you to every rehearsal and performance. A listless and bored actor can spoil the atmosphere for all participants. Every line you deliver, every movement which you make should be as if it were the first time. That "illusion of first time" is critical to a good performance. We ought never to give anything less. But we need to work on keeping the freshness alive, particularly if the drama will be staged several times.



Acting Techniques

The following are some specific skill required by actors, from entrance on to the stage to final curtain call.

Entering the Stage



We always say that the two most difficult things in drama are getting on the stage and getting off the stage. Entrances are difficult since the entrance will "set the stage" as to how the audience will feel about the entire presentation. The cast will have a great deal of difficulty recovering from a poor or weak entrance. For this reason it is only wise to spend a substantial amount of effort on entrances.

Entering the stage must tell the audience that you have *come from a definite place, going to a definite place, for a definite reason, in a definite state of mind*. Your every action must put this across to the audience. In order to be convincing you must be in character well before going on stage. We always coach our actors to get into character immediately after getting arriving for the drama presentation. We ask that there be no guests allowed backstage and that there be relative quiet and peacefulness. The stage manager will review with each actor any updates or information which they must know such as hand props, reminders of cues, etc. Any wardrobe or makeup will be attended to at this time. The time has long passed where study of lines will be of any assistance therefore there is no need for going over the script. We spend time in prayer as a group, asking for God's blessing on our ministry. We believe that God will always put at least one needy person in the audience to whom each actor will minister and we ask that our ministry offering will be relevant to that person and glorifying to God. Following prayer time we ask that each actor spend time individually reviewing their character, to the point where they *are* that character. Particular care must be taken to ensure that the actor is fully aware of how they shall enter the stage: their posture, mood, attitude toward other actors; the statement which their character will present to the audience.

As you stand in the wings, ready for your cue to go on stage, some rules:

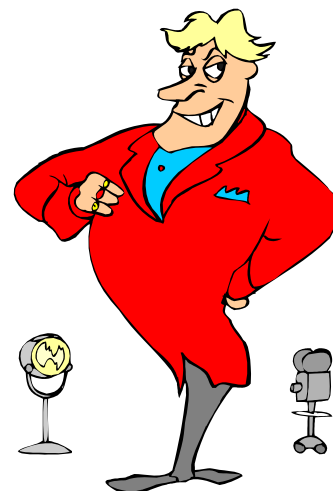
- the actor must already be in character when backstage. If you are not fully in character before you step on stage you will not be in character at all,
- no talking backstage,

- stay well back from stage area to ensure that you are not seen by the audience,
- if there is light in the wings take care that your shadow is not visible to the audience,
- do not block the exit as other actors enter and exit,
- plan your entrance in such a way that you will be on stage at the precise time and that you will speak right on cue. Nothing looks worse than a late response to a cue when all action has to wait while the next actor gets into place,
- stairs make for a difficult entrance. If you are negotiating stairs, take care that you do not trip while at the same time not looking directly at the stairs,
- entering through a door can also be a challenge. Open the door with the hand nearest the hinges and close the door with the opposite hand,
- always enter the stage on the upstage foot so that your body is turned downstage in view of the audience,
- if several characters are entering together, try having the speaker enter last in order that the speaker does not have to turn back to look at the others. If this is not possible, have the speaker look back over his downstage shoulder so his face is visible to the audience,
- do not cover your face while speaking lines as you enter,
- realize that you will likely not be miked as you enter, therefore remember to project those lines,
- you are your character, not yourself as you go on stage. If

you are listening to your voice and watching your movements you will become self conscious and nervous and will be thinking of yourself rather than on your character.

- as you walk out on stage the audience truly will not exist. Put them entirely out of your mind now, before you go on stage. If you have friends and family out front they will be there when the performance is over. Until then they do not exist. We strongly suggest that when amateur actors are playing lines downstage, they play to a spot somewhat above the heads of the audience. This keeps any sudden movement in the audience away from the actor and will therefore not break concentration.
- remember that performance night is the time for application, not for inspiration. The technique, movements, delivery and animation which you have practiced for weeks are those which you will use. Don't get a new idea and decide to try it out on performance night. The director will be eager to hear of your new idea, for the next drama that is!

Now that you are on stage, immediately establish the *center of interest* by turning your gaze to wherever and whomever that



is on the stage, and giving your full attention. Center of interest is that person, object or situation upon which you want the audience to focus. By staring at that location you will help lead the attention of the audience to the center of interest. If you are the center of interest move firmly to take the stage as per the director's advice to you. When you are a supporting actor be present but inconspicuous. It is the role of all actors to support that actor who is the current center of attention at the moment. If another actor is in error blocking you from the audience's view, move quietly into a position where you will be seen. Avoid huddling together as a group, (unless this is the image which you are trying to project), nor should you hide behind furniture.

The picture which the audience sees on stage should be that of a well balanced picture. The group can make this happen by grouping in a rounded or triangular arrangement, the main character for that scene may be in the top center position, or at any other location which commands the attention of the audience. As another character takes on the main role in the scene, characters may have to slowly switch positions to allow main character to assume dominant position. In some cases, to establish dominance, the main character will move to a higher elevation with supporting actors looking at him.

Movement, crossing and position are important factors to understand. No movement on stage should be made without a reason for the movement. If there is no reason for movement – there

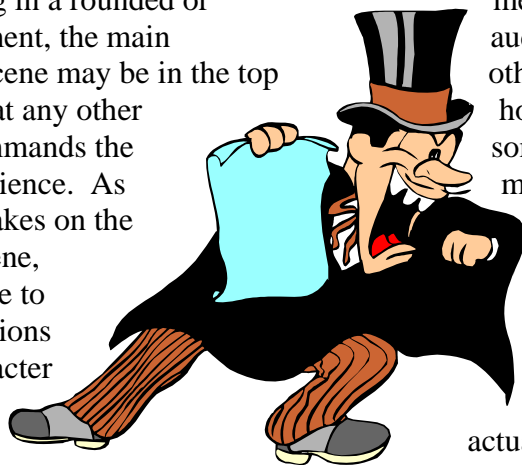
should be no movement. Under normal circumstances, crossing, (moving from one stage location to another), should not be done while any actor, (including yourself), is speaking. Try to cross between speeches where possible. When you do move, do so with decision. Move directly to the proper position and stand there. Unless there is a definite move, all actors should stand motionless in order not to take attention away from the center of interest. Pay particular attention to fidgeting and careless hand movements.

If gesturing, make it a definite movement, use the upstage arm in order not to prevent the audience from seeing you fully.

When characters are talking together they must stand in such a way that both faces can be clearly and easily seen by the audience. Open yourself up, (turn toward the audience), in order that facial

messages will not be lost to the audience. Try to look at the other actor as much as possible, however you will find sometimes that doing so will mean turning your back to some part of your audience. In these cases you should turn somewhat toward the audience, eyes trained on a spot somewhat downstage from the actor's

actual stage position. This will give the illusion to most people in the audience that you are looking directly at the other actor. You should however from time to time turn and look directly at the true location of the other actor. Under normal circumstances, never act with your back to the audience. This is not only to allow the audience full view of your facial gestures but also to make voice projection easier. While wireless



mikes are a real boon, they are so expensive that most drama groups can have only a limited number, if any. Back to audience, just as any other rule, should be regarded as a guideline, not as a commandment cast in stone. There may be many cases where having the actor's back to the audience may create a very profound effect.

Take care not to act outside the limits of the lighting. Ensure also that you do not stand in the wrong place and therefore cast a shadow on another actor or prop. When picking up a hand prop or talking about some prop on stage, remember to look directly at it. In the same way ensure that you look directly at another character before you address him. This creates reality and helps guide the audience as to where their attention should be focusing from time to time. Sitting in a chair and rising again is a difficult art. (See section in Pantomime - Acting Without Words for exercises in this area).

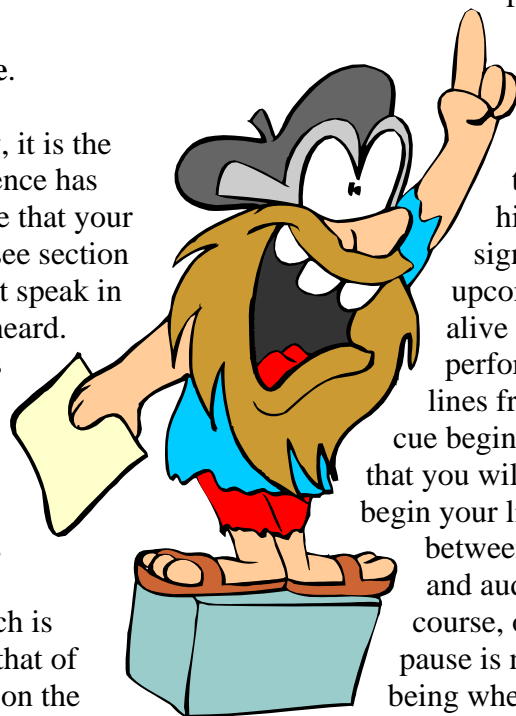
Speaking your piece.

At the end of the day, it is the lines which the audience has come to hear. Ensure that your delivery is correct, (see section on Voice). You must speak in such a way as to be heard. Pauses between lines should only happen if planned, and then should be well rehearsed. One scene which has great opportunity for success, yet one which is seldom well done is that of a character speaking on the phone. Obviously the audience is only hearing the one side of the phone

conversation. Don't rush the listening part of the conversation. Ensure that sufficient time is allowed for the imaginary response on the other end of the phone line. Mark out the beats for the imaginary response and hold to that timing. For examples of phone conversation see the DramaShare script, "Missions Conference".

Now, what happens when there is a pause in the action. In spite of all the practices, it will happen that someone loses their line. In these cases controlled ad-libbing saves the day. These lines should be spoken as though part of the script, inserting important pieces of information which the other actor has not supplied. In rehearsals you should practice what will be done when someone loses their line, particularly in areas of the script where you are having trouble in rehearsal.

Another problem which surfaces rather frequently with amateur actors is where the actor fails to immediately pick up his cue and start his lines. This is caused by the actor memorizing only his lines and not his cues, the signals that his lines are upcoming. All actors should be alive during the entire performance, face reacting to the lines from other actors. As your cue begins take a deep breath in order that you will be immediately ready to begin your lines. That painful pause between lines is difficult for cast and audience alike. There is, of course, one situation where the pause is necessary and planned, that being where there is laughter or applause. In this case the character will have to hold the action, without losing



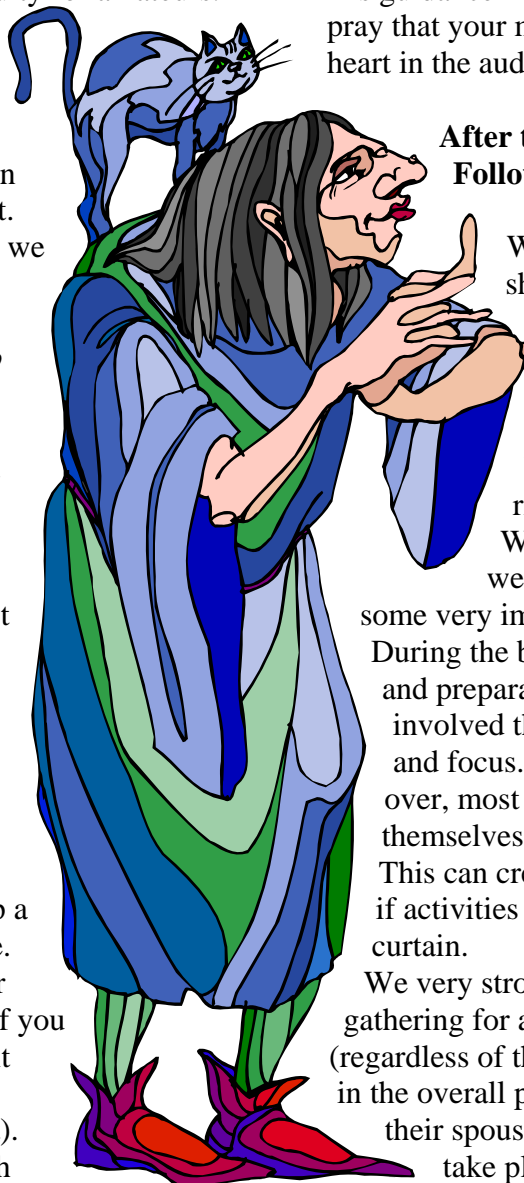
the lines, emotion or tempo, until the laughter or applause has died down. As soon as most of the noise has died down the actor will start his lines, at a very slow tempo. The actor's voice will serve to fully quiet the audience, at which time the actor can return to his normal pace and delivery. It is these "wonderful interruptions", the laughter, which makes comedy a difficulty for amateurs.

Exiting the Stage

Difficult as entrances are, exits, in our opinion are much more difficult. In discussing entrances we mentioned that "you have *come from a definite place, going to a definite place, for a definite reason, in a definite state of mind*". The same holds true in exits. One major difference with exits is that, unlike entrances, it is all over as you leave the spotlights. A less than perfect entrance can, to some degree be made up for in an outstanding on-stage performance. Nothing can be done to patch up a bad exit after you leave. Therefore practice your exit very thoroughly. If you have an exit line, give it with your best effort, (naturally don't overact). But leave the stage with purpose. Don't amble out or glance out into the audience as you leave. Stay in character until you are totally, entirely off stage, out of sight of

audience and cast, away from lights. If you happen to be wearing a wireless mike be particularly carefully, just in case the sound man hasn't switched off your power.

When the drama ends there should be a time for prayer with the entire cast and crew. This is a time to thank God for His guidance in the performance and pray that your ministry has touched a heart in the audience.



After the Final Curtain - Follow-up

What a sense of relief, the show is finally over! Now an opportunity for everyone, (especially the Director and the Stage Manager), to sit back and take it easy - right?

Wrong! Before taking that well deserved rest there is some very important work to be done! During the busy period of rehearsal and preparation everyone is so involved that they have purpose and focus. But after the show is over, most participants will find themselves at somewhat of a loss. This can create an unfulfilled feeling if activities end with the final curtain.

We very strongly recommend a social gathering for all participants, (regardless of the role which they played in the overall performance), and for their spouse. This gathering should take place within a week after the close of the show. (Any greater delay than this will result in a lessening in the enthusiasm, participants will be on a "high" for a time after the show

however this will disappear if not promptly followed up on. What are the reasons for this gathering?

- gives an opportunity for the Director and Stage Manager to properly express their thanks.
- gives an opportunity for each participant to express what the experience has meant to them on a personal, spiritual basis. At *DramaShare* we believe that the only reason for involvement in Christian Drama Ministry is to praise God. We find that most participants find the experience as a very real, personal ministry. As leaders it is our duty to ensure that people get the opportunity to relate what this experience has meant in their Christian lives, and this is most easily done among peers.
- gives an opportunity for the church leadership, (pastors, Board of Elders, etc.), to meet with participants in order to make everyone feel that their efforts were viewed as important.
- gives an opportunity to thank spouses and families for the inconveniences caused during this production. It also is an opportunity to recruit participants for future productions.

Most importantly this final time together should be a time of worship. If you have done your job properly, each rehearsal, each meeting, each contact should have been an opportunity for you and for each person in the team to grow in the "knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord". (*II Peter 1:2*). Therefore this final meeting of the group should be the culmination, not just of the presentation in which all have shared, but more importantly the fulfilled opportunity to worship God through a talent used and dedicated to His glory.

At *DramaShare* we recommend a small, personalized memento for every participant, regardless of the role which they played: stage hand or leading lady, sound man or makeup artist. We have developed the small card pictured here, which we use. We ask that everyone sign each other's cards since this is an outward indication of the strong bonds of friendships which will have grown in the group if the climate was right and was properly encouraged.

THANK YOU!

FOR GIVING TO THE LORD



Your involvement in "Meeting Between Two Mothers" was greatly appreciated.

Thanks you for ministering to the congregation and to others in the drama ministry!

Elm Street Community Church

Special Acting Skills

Certain skills need some extra preparation and practice.

- old age** is used frequently in Christian drama and must be done with tenderness and care. If not done properly, a humorous or pathetic character can be created where this was not the intent. Properly done, an elderly character can quickly bring forth tears and smiles from an audience. In *DramaClub* we believe that the best person to play a senior is a senior, since they know better than anyone else what being a senior is all about. However, in those cases where a younger person is playing a senior, some factors should be borne in mind. In seniors there is varying degrees



of an uncertainty of movement, a slowing down in rate of speaking, change in pitch of the

voice, more wooden gesturing, changes in facial expressions, etc. Although we often want to portray an older person as crotchety and mean, the fact is that old age often brings on a mellowness, vibrancy, color and quiet spirit which are lacking in those younger. One rule which must be followed in characterizing an older person is not to trivialize, sensationalize or minimize seniors as persons simply because of their age. The following was a comment from our Christian-Drama-Forum email list:

Remember that portraying someone else does require us to understand that person. As a younger person we don't typically visualize what it means to not be able to get up, or to take a step. I am 58, and in poor health. It not only hurts to take a step, it is labored. It is as if my legs don't seem to follow my orders. I have little or no balance. Getting up frequently takes me a long time, because a lot of it is the dread of how much it hurts to just get up. Once up, I have a few moments in which I am as likely to fall as take a step. Lifting a glass of water is hard, not only because it may start shaking, but because I may drop it for no real reason.

I deal with some embarrassment because I have to get someone to carry in my groceries from the car. Sometimes things sit in my car for days until I have help. I can hardly ever catch my breath. I don't remember recent things as well as I used to. Sometimes a simple question requires intense thought to answer.

This information is given, not for sympathy, because believe me, many people are amazed at what I can do and do. I always find a way to accomplish things. I recently lay on the ground at the church and repaired an emergency gas leak, because I was there and it had to be done quick. I will never give up. I just wanted to give some understanding for motivation to the young person. Older people or handicapped people are dealing with maintaining dignity in the face of their age or problems or both.

I was once very strong. I could once bench-press 300lbs. I could once swim 5-10 miles before breakfast. I could once work hundreds of feet in the air on an 18" wide platform. The pictures of my past are all over the house. I am constantly aware of who I was, and constantly faced with who I am.

Here is where I start in the motivation speech again. Learn, as an actor, to feel it deep within. Try closing your eyes and feel every motion of getting up out of a chair. You can't just "pop" to your feet. You have to grip the arms of the chair firmly and safely. You must position yourself, so that at the point of rising you are balanced. Each physical movement involves either pain or perhaps just the effect of a rusty hinge. It works, but slowly or labored.

Each step requires balance before the next one can be taken. Most elderly or handicapped get fairly good at hiding the obvious pain or problems, so it is the subtle ones that are seen. Sitting down is usually a point of great relief. Sitting down frequently involves even a brief moment of leaning back in relief, with a brief close of the eyes in an acceptance of what may be an accomplishment.

The simplest tasks are often labored. Brushing your teeth, brushing your hair. Eating, drinking a glass of water. Writing with a pen or pencil. Bending down to pick up something. Now exceptions do exist! My mother is 86 and you wouldn't believe she was over 40 physically. She walks and works everyday. She is healthy, and pretty spry. But she has subtle things. Her writing is somewhat labored, not an even flow of movements. There is some of the problems getting up. There is some of the shaking, there is some change in voice. She has arthritis, so sometimes her hands hurt and you can tell from the way she holds something or hands you something.

In conclusion, as always, it is best to never over-exaggerate. That is a dead giveaway. Don't just imagine the feelings or movements, try to feel them. Remember that an older person is old not just in their face, but hands, feet, arms, legs, etc. They are not necessarily hunched over. Do not necessarily have a wavery voice. Honor them in your actions and your acting. Try having other actors picture themselves in the role, and examine what they do. Maybe video tape the scene so the actor can get a better perspective of what's happening on stage. Know of an older person who is willing to do some of the business on stage so the young actor could watch?

*Your servant in Christ,
Karl Wagner*

- **dialects** are sometimes used in Christian drama. The only concern that we have is that if taking on dialect in drama, be prepared to do some major work in order to get it right. The audience won't really notice if no dialect is used, they will notice and not be impressed, (may even be offended), if it is used badly. (This is particularly true in cross-cultural presentations).
- **laughter** is one of the most difficult special skills to learn in drama, yet laughter is so much a part of drama that this skill must be learned. When you think of it, laughter happens only as a relaxed reaction which simply - happens. When an amateur actor is on the stage it is normal that s/he is tense and not relaxed, therefore laughter doesn't come easy.



There is only one good source for laughter training and that is people around us. Watch and listen carefully and see the various types of laughs, from guffaws to snorts to sniggers to uproarious knee-slappers. All have one thing in common - sound. Yet when you watch an amateur performer on stage there will often be no sound at all. Watch as a person laughs. The laugh comes as the abdominal muscles suddenly contract forcing a sharp gasp of breath. As this breath goes through the larynx it will be given sound. Panting, with abdominal muscles tightening as you exhale and relaxing as you inhale is a good exercise. Try putting sound with the panting,