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METHOD ACTING

Brian Timoney is one of the UK's most outspoken advocates of method acting. His recent credits include leading roles in the BBC drama documentary Samuel Johnson: The Dictionary Man and the UK premiere of the Tennessee Williams play, The Pink Bedroom, which he also directed. He runs the Brian Timoney Actors' Studio, which is based at the Courtyard Theatre in London. He has over two decades of experience in the acting industry and has worked closely with directors Danny Boyle and Ken Loach as well as actors including Gerrard Butler and Helen McCrory. Here he tells us what attracted him to method in the first place and what the technique has to offer the jobbing actor.

I'd done my professional training at drama school and had been working relatively successfully, but I got to a point where I felt there was something missing. When you're looking at acting at its top form, you have to look at who's producing that type of work and how they do it. I discovered people like Sean Penn, Robert De Nero and Meryl Streep, who all use method acting. That's what really started me on my journey with method.

The technique is extremely logical. It was born out of conversations with people who were already successful actors. It's logical, but it's also challenging. I'd consider it the heavyweight of actor training. It takes someone who is truly committed to taking their acting to that level and to push the boundaries within themselves and within the art form.

There are a couple of aspects to consider when it comes to creating characters with method. The initial stage is looking at a character's life and what they went through. You're basically revealing the life of another human being, that's the job of an actor, but you have to understand the parallels between their life and your life as well.

There's no faking in method acting so if you're going to produce the same emotional content that the character goes through it's about re-experiencing those emotions. If the character is experiencing grief, for example, I try to recreate that emotion in me.

You start by trying to understand a moment in your own life where you may have experienced that emotion. We relive it through the senses: we see it, smell it, taste it, feel it, touch it, and that's how we recreate it. By doing that, the emotional content starts to be generated again. You then fuse that with the character and the events that you're portraying.

The external aspect is how the character walks and talks. One of the exercises we use to recreate how the character moves is the animal exercise,

where you look at various animals that might have a relationship with the character you're playing. For example, Marlon Brando played an ape in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and Robert De Niro used a crab in *Taxi Driver*. You're looking at a way of incorporating a physicality that's obviously very different from your own - one of the basic mistakes that actors make is that they remain too close to their own physicality.

The method has been vilified for the lengths that actors go to in their research, but the proof is in the results. If De Niro decides he wants to go and drive a cab - which he did for a month before he made *Taxi Driver* - for me that's just logical. You need to know the environment that this person operates in so it's logical to really delve into that character's life and live it for real. If you want to portray highly emotionally charged roles and characters that are going through pain, grief, happiness, all these things, then obviously you're going to experience them as you play the part. It can be challenging, but the pay off is that you recreate it truthfully and absolutely for real. What's the point of faking it?

Brian Timoney was talking to Jo Caird

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