

# AMERICAN THEATRE

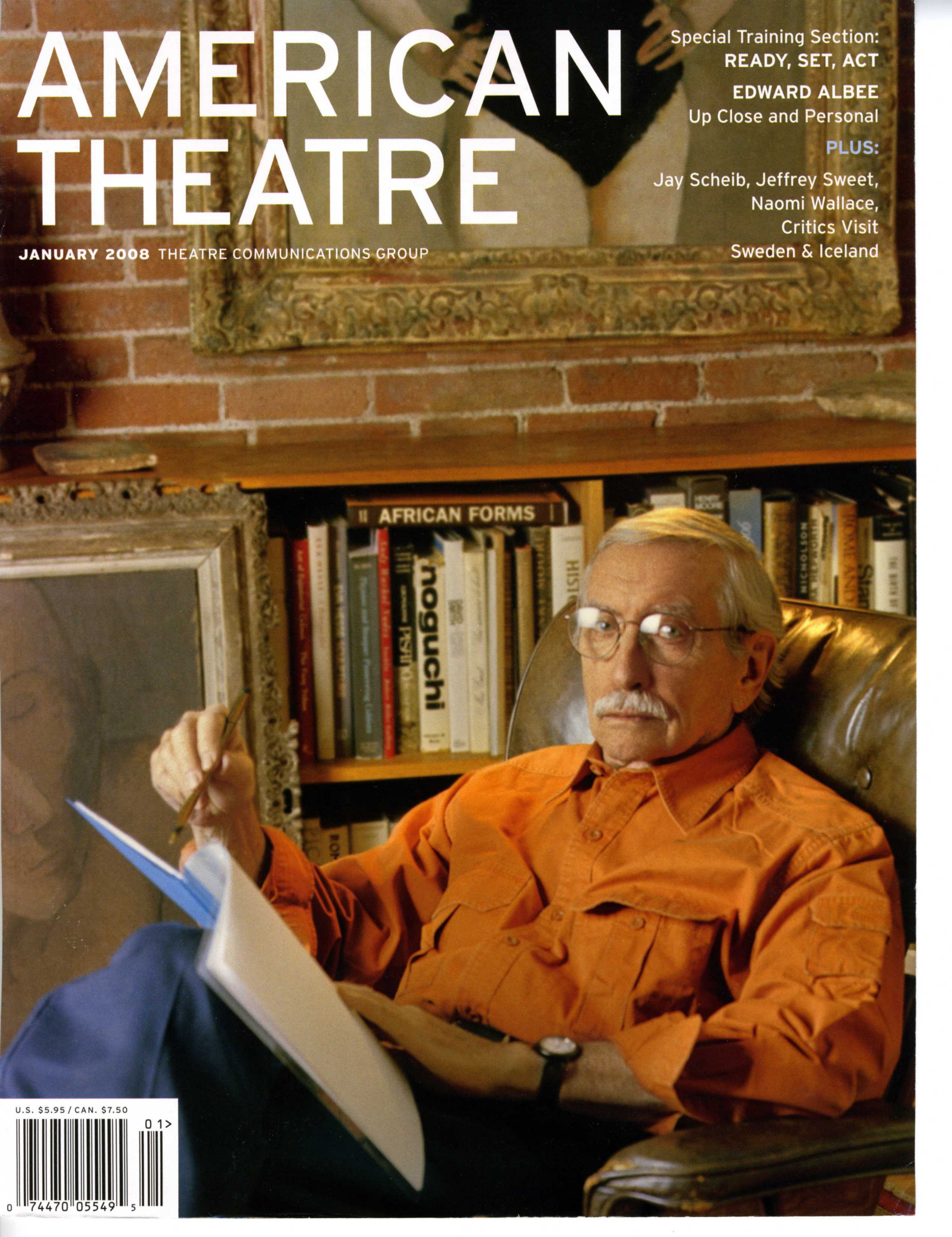
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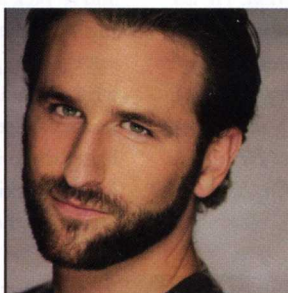
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# FOR WORKING THE



BY CHARLIE HENSLEY



FRANCHELLE STEWART DORN

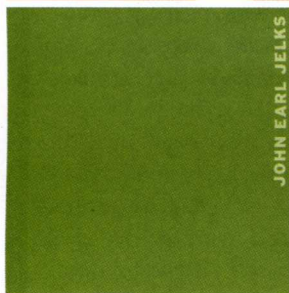
JORDAN LAGE

BENJAMIN BAUMAN

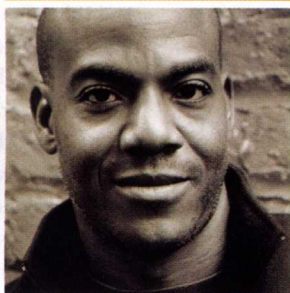


SEAN DUGAN

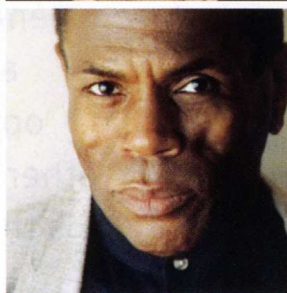
ELLEN LAUREN



JOHN EARL JELKS



ANDRÉ DE SHIELDS



LAGE: ERIC ANTONIOU / HUNTINGTON THEATRE COMPANY; DE SHIELDS: LIA CHANG

## ACTORS IN SEARCH OF THEIR DISTINCTIVE VOICES CREATE

here is no more exhilarating or powerful feeling than being in The Zone, where the actor's work pours perfectly, effortlessly onto the stage in a consummate alignment of moment, performer, role, craft, heart and audience.

No matter how fine the actor, The Zone is an elusive place to find night after night. Housing sucks, parents get sick, babies cry, cell phones go off, props fall apart, concentration breaks, lines go awry—and the actor starts chasing, rather than driving, the play. In rehearsal, too, a fence can suddenly appear, and it must be scaled or jumped or knocked down for the work to go forward.

Once, even the most rudimentary public education in America included Latin, Greek, rhetoric, memorization, elocution and an immersion in classical literature. Armed with these, any ambitious young actor could go on to learn the elements of stagecraft in the company of more experienced, professional colleagues.

Today, artists must seek out a conservatory or university even for the basics, or they face a far tougher curriculum at the School of

Hard Knocks. One invaluable reading in this regard is *Training of the American Actor* (TCG Books), a survey of 10 acting techniques articulated by their founders or torch bearers, edited by Arthur Bartow.

Americans seem never to have found an idea they couldn't, or wouldn't, adapt for their own uses, and actor training is no different. In the 20th century, the influence of Stanislavsky and the enormous might of his American descendants (Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner) certainly made believers of a vast number of American stage and film actors—and audiences. As Bartow puts it, "The acting techniques that arose in America were designed either to emphasize certain aspects of Stanislavsky's work or to react against it."

Recently, several actors of varying ages and backgrounds were asked what they use to reach The Zone, sustain a career and achieve Meisner's dictum of "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances." They talked about the very personal, individualized practical application—and adaptation—they've made of their training. Like all good actors, they just want every available advantage when their cues come...or don't.

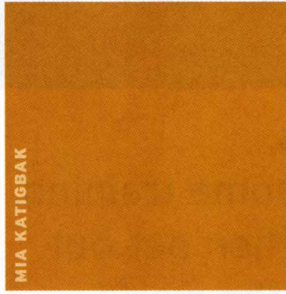
# ACTORS, READINESS IS ALL



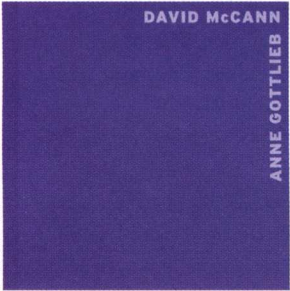
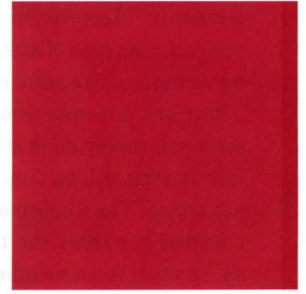
DAVID McCANN



MIA KATIGBAK



PETER FRANCIS JAMES



ANNE GOTTLIEB



## A NEW BREW FROM INGREDIENTS THEY'VE GATHERED OVER TIME

### Is acting technique a philosophy or a process?

André De Shields, a veteran New York-based actor who this past year received an Obie award for sustained excellence in the theatre, says, “The term ‘acting technique’ conjures images of alchemy, the process of transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary, the prosaic into the exceptional, and the commonplace into holy ground.” Anne Gottlieb—an actress who is co-creating and producing, and will perform in, a new play based on the letters and diaries of the Dutch Jewish writer Etty Hillesum—says she believes that technique is “a place to start, a leaping-off point to fire the impulses and the imagination.”

Franchelle Stewart Dorn and David McCann are just ending nearly five months of rehearsing and performing together as the Turkish empress and emperor in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* and in *Edward II*, both at the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. McCann defines technique as “the ability to get your body, voice and spirit to go wherever you ask them to go and, sometimes, to be so free that they take you somewhere you never imagined. Then, of

course, you have to be heard and seen—and, hopefully, you’re not bumping into the furniture.”

For Dorn—whose teacher, the legendary Bobby Lewis, imparted the basics of “objective–action–obstacle”—technique is vital as a support for the characters she creates. “Those basics, I realize, are how I live my life,” she says. “We get up in the morning, see things we want or need, then we go out and get them. Actors tend to think the words on paper have to *mean* something or *do* something on their own, but you have to get past that to the connecting. That ability to connect with another actor—in that moment on stage—is the gift, the one I’m most interested in. You use breathing, inflection and all your tools as an actor to sustain that moment.”

Mia Katigbak, a stage actor who is the artistic producing director and co-founder of the 19-year-old National Asian American Theatre Company of New York, says, “I equate ‘technique’ with mechanics, like being able to be proficient with scales in music, or barre or floor work in dance. It’s always been hard for me to come up with equivalents in acting, aside from vocal or physical work, that is. Those are

