

Book Review / Recension

Demetra Jajidiacos. (2006). *Acting Alone: A Drama Teacher's Monologue Survival Kit*. Winnipeg, MB: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing Inc. (125 pages) ISBN: 1-897289-00-6 (paperback)

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There are several teaching resources on acting, directing, and playwriting that have proven to be useful to theatre teachers. Among the more widely used ones are Uta Hagen's *Respect for Acting* (1973); William Ball's *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Direction* (1984); and Michael Wright's *Playwriting in Process: Thinking and Working Theatrically* (1997). Within these resources there are chapters that look specifically at working on monologues, typically for audition purposes. What distinguishes Jajidiacos' *Acting Alone: A Drama Teacher's Monologue Survival Kit* is its exclusive focus on how to develop teaching units on writing and performing monologues. In addition, Jajidiacos's monologues are written specifically with adolescent performers in mind. Other theatre books on monologues exist, yet the majority of these are collections of monologues from published plays, such as Tony Hamill's *The Perfect Piece: Monologues from Canadian Plays* (1990), with most monologues targeted for adult actors. As well, few collections specify how a monologue unit can become a vital component of a theatre arts curriculum.

Jajidiacos makes a strong case for the value of using monologues to develop young actors (secondary as well as university students), arguing that monologue work can be a key component within a theatre program. Her book, user friendly, takes the reader through a logical process of how to set up and follow through with monologue work. She introduces the concept of both writing and performing monologues in an inviting,

clear manner that would encourage most teachers to try her approach with theatre students.

The book is divided into five sections. The first section looks at preparing students to do monologue work. Jajidiacos suggests that monologues should not be the first unit teachers introduce. She proposes that warm-up activities, improvisation work, and scene study approaches should precede a monologue unit. She provides useful warm-up and improvisation activities to support her argument of providing foundational skills prior to jumping into monologues. She argues that this gradual approach prepares students to successfully work on monologues, which is the second section of the book – writing and performing monologues. In this section she shares her philosophy on how to help students write their own monologues without realizing that they are actually writing. She also offers precise suggestions on how to revise and edit the work, making the monologues ready for performance. The third section provides specific suggestions on how teachers themselves can write monologues for their students. This leads to the fourth section where the author shares dozens of written monologues that her students have performed over the years. The final section looks at ways to create a fruitful performance evening of monologues by students. She takes the reader through helpful ways to set up such an evening into a successful experience for performers and audience. Suggestions on lighting usage, promotional material, stage management, dress, and technical rehearsals, among others, are helpful reminders to theatre teachers on the importance of a thoughtful and thorough preparation.

Acting Alone does not set out to be an academic or theoretical exploration of a theatre approach; therefore, to argue that it lacks scholarship seems to be a moot point. Consequently, this is not necessarily a resource that scholars would refer to search for supporting material in their research. Similar to Talia Pura's *Stages: Creative Ideas for Teaching Drama* (2002), which is also published by J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing, this book targets practising teachers, offering them tried and tested activities for classroom use. As a practical book, it succeeds very well; the ideas, lessons, and rationale are excellent. I will certainly share this book with pre-service and in-service teachers as a useful resource to help develop worthy units within their theatre programs.

REFERENCES

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