



Method Acting

We've got a kind of 'double story' today; the same story told twice - forty years apart!

Episode #1 is something that happened to me when I was in high school. I was a very serious music student in the final couple of years of school, far more so than most of the other students, for whom the music period was just a 'break' between regular classes. Owing to this eagerness, I was of course a 'favourite' of the music teacher, and was selected now and then to be featured in a solo performance with the school band.

On one such occasion, I was given a piccolo solo to play - but a solo with a difference. The piece of music was kind of a 'joke' number; it appears to be a piccolo solo, but each time the band comes to a cadence and the soloist lifts his instrument ready to play, some other member of the band jumps up and interrupts with *his* solo instead. This goes on and on, and bit by bit the piccolo soloist becomes more and more frustrated, eventually giving up in disgust and stalking angrily off stage. But unknown to the audience, he then runs around the outside of the building, sneaks in the front door, and waits at the back of the hall. Then, just when the band is coming to the climax of the piece, he bursts forth with his solo, and marches triumphantly up the aisle, playing as he goes.

Now this isn't so much a piece of music, as a piece of theatre, and I really didn't quite know how to 'play' it. But I was game to give it a try, and the band teacher put it on one of the school concert programs. It was a complete disaster - or so I thought. Each time I got interrupted by somebody, I was supposed to act surprised, and then gradually angry and upset, but I didn't know how to do that. I am not any kind of actor at all, and was completely lost. I felt confused, and really regretted getting involved in such a silly thing in the first place. But there was no way to stop it, so I just pressed on gamely, feeling more and more frustrated as we went along, and by the time we got to the part where I stormed off the stage, I was just completely lost. But a minute later, when I made my triumphant 'surprise' entrance, I did it well, because I *did* know how to play the thing, and was glad to finally have a chance.

Well, at the final chord, the audience went completely crazy. Wave after wave of applause. When I sat back down in my place, my neighbours all congratulated me on a good job, and in the days following the concert many people - students and teachers - came up to me in the hallways to offer praise. What had happened?

Completely unknowingly, I *had* actually acted the proper role! I had been frustrated and at a loss what to do, and because I can't act at all, this frustration had visibly shown in my face and my actions. I was *perfect* in the role, and everybody in the school had been surprised that shy little David had pulled off such a good characterization! They had thought I was *acting*!

Episode #2 took place on Monday. You may remember that last week I mentioned that I would be going downtown to try and find a good gallery to hold an upcoming exhibition, and as it turned out, after quite an exhaustive search through the entire Ginza area, guidebook and printouts in hand, I did find a place that looked suitable. I sat down with the owner to discuss the terms.

There were two exhibition rooms available in the building, one upstairs and cheaper, and one at street level and more expensive. Now it's pretty clear that many businesses are in difficult straits these days, so I thought

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that this gallery should perhaps be ready to offer some flexibility on their printed rental rates. The problem though - as I have previously written in Story a Week - is that I am completely hopeless at bargaining when purchasing something or making a deal of any kind. And so it was this time; I was just unable to bring myself to ask for a discount. It just isn't my character.

But concerning me more than the price itself, was the decision on which of the two rooms to rent. I was really quite stuck, trying to balance the competing factors - the cheapness upstairs, the better exposure downstairs. As the two of us sat there at a small table, with the contract between us, I hesitated, and then hesitated some more, and said something like, "Well, I'm not really sure ..."

She took this 'cue' and offered a discount on the rental rate for the ground floor room - 10% off. I was a bit surprised, but kept my composure, and nodded a 'thank you'. But I still didn't know which to choose, and sat back in my chair, looking at her while mulling it over and trying to come to a decision. A minute later, she spoke again - 25%. This brought the price on the downstairs room to a very reasonable level, and I readily agreed, and we signed the papers.

So there we have it; you know I think I just might have a career in acting ahead of me. As long as I can get roles that require the expression of confusion and frustration, I'll be perfect! I'd better make room on my shelf for my first Oscar!

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