

Articles about Sande from the 2001 Newsletter

MARK KASSEN on Sande Shurin Backstage September 1st 2000 by Elias Stimac

Program Yourself, Then Let Fly... Mark Kassen's list of credits includes playing the lead in the long running Off-Broadway hit "Thing's You Shouldn't Say Past Midnight" at the Promenade Theater. Before that, he performed in Los Angeles in "The Last Night of Ballyhoo." On film, he acted in the recent movie of the week called "Growing Up Brady," playing the manager of the TV family. He also had a recurring role on the television sitcom "Cybill," and appeared on "Third Watch." Having trained with various programs on both coasts, Kassen found a New York instructor with whom he really clicked. "My teacher, who I don't do anything without is Sande Shurin. Her approach is that you kind of program yourself like a computer, working up your character. Then when it's time to go, you do something very simple where you center yourself, you tune into yourself, and then you must let it fly. That's not only a great metaphor for life, but really important when you have to do more than one thing. It allows you to have brilliant quick shifts from task to task to task and to be able to present in each one of them, which is really what great acting is. And there's no better way to do it than being prepared."

Kassen had the opportunity to just that while acting in the upcoming feature film "Trigger Happy," which he also produced. "When you are acting and producing, you never really get a day off. That's one of those experiences when you rely on technique and craft. As a producer, you're thinking in a very linear manner—you're very detail-oriented making sure everybody's where they need to be on time and making sure that people are getting paid and fed. Then when it's time for you to act, you need to rely on something that can allow you to let all of that go, and you can just concentrate on doing your role."

The actor feels fortunate to be able to alternate between screen and stage assignments. "I prefer to do that, because it's working two sides of the same muscle. Staying in one medium would be like only getting to work out your hamstrings and not getting to workout your quadriceps. Film is great because it allows you to explore reality and intimacy in a way that you can't on stage—you can stare someone in the eyes and really get into it. Theater is pretty powerful because there's the third entity, the audience, which gives an energy that you can feed off of and you have to acknowledge". In addition, Kassen feels that stage experience can help immeasurably when working on a film role. "In film, you don't have long periods of time and lots of words to help you discover the character, whereas in theater you do. So if you get to do both, theater actually gives you a great springboard to know how you go about getting what you need to get. And then, in film, you can access that".

DAPHNE RUBIN-VEGA on Sande Shurin Backstage Jan 14, 2000 by Elias Stimac

In the Moment... Acting teacher and private coach Sande Shurin has developed a technique called transformational acting, which she teaches performers on both coasts. Described as a "beyond sense memory" technique, the approach focuses on shaping a character based on the actor's physical, psychological state at the time of the performance, rather than relying on emotional recall. One of Shurin's most satisfied students is Daphne Rubin-Vega. The actress-singer was born in Panama, grew up in New York, where she attended the high school for the Performing Arts and sang in a girl group called Pajama Party. She made her breakthrough by creating Mimi in Broadway's "Rent". In 1997, seeking an acting teacher, she asked "Rent's" Anthony Rapp for advice. "Without missing a beat he replied, 'Sande Shurin.' He has known her forever, and was always singing her praises. So I checked her out. I went to her class got some work here, and then actually got cast in "Flawless" [with Robert DeNiro] while I was with her. We ended up working on my character from the film together."

Rubin-Vega originally joined Shurin's limited class of 20 students, which was offered on a weekly basis in Shurin's Studio. Now the actress continues to meet with Shurin privately, to further incorporate the coach's process into her acting technique.

I've taken Meisner classes in the past, which basically ask you to rely on recall and imagination. Sande helps you to use all your resources. She makes you realize that you are your biggest resource. The eccentricities and the quirks of your character are actually your own. That's what you are bringing into the part—you end up putting a lot of yourself into your character.

"The main element of Sande's 'beyond sense memory' technique is that it uses your life—the emotions and feelings you are experiencing in your daily life—rather than going back to your memory. Sande's theory is that you the actor are your own biggest resource. Sande asks you to call on your 'self' your entirety of being. What matters to you now, what you are about right now informs your character."

Shurin saw Rubin-Vega recently Off-Broadway in "Gum," a modern tragedy in which the actress played a Middle Eastern woman.

Subsequently they did some preliminary work together on "Skeleton Woman," a film that Rubin-Vega had been cast in. "Sande helped me define what my character wanted, and her main action. Once you figure that out—what kind of character it is, and what her desire is—then you can embody the character and fulfill those objectives. Sande helps by showing you how to transform yourself into the character, how you take who you are right now and bring it into the role".

Rubin-Vega points out that while you should be aware of your feelings and let them channel into your character they should not alter the performance, but rather enhance it. "The spontaneity can help inform and beautify what you're doing, but certainly it's not meant to throw curve balls at your fellow actors every night during the run of the show. When you're in a performance, it's not about going outside what's been agreed upon; it's about using the moment.

"That's what Sande's breakthroughs are about. Anything that is happening with you can take you into another state of emotional intensity, and can make your responses different. The point is to stay in the moment while you are on stage. You can ground yourself and center yourself by asking "What is going on with me right now, physically and emotionally?" Sometimes during her class Sande would make us sit and be with ourselves, feel our emotional body and get it stirred up so we were able to access it.

"Whether you are training in a class or one on one with Sande both experiences have relevance. It's fascinating to get activated in a class. You can get plugged into that energy when you're with other actors. Then in one on one sessions it becomes easier to work yourself into that energized state.

ANTHONY RAPP on Sande Shurin, Backstage September 11, 1998 by RA

Going Deeper... Long before he ever had to pay his own rent, Anthony Rapp was performing in Broadway shows. At age nine, he appeared in the Chicago leg of "Evita"'s national tour. He soon found himself on Broadway in the brief run of "The Little Prince and the Aviator," When most guys were stumbling in dirty from the playground to celebrate their 11th birthdays, Rapp was touring with Yul Brenner in the "King and I." So it shouldn't be surprising that this 26 year old veteran- who originated Mark Cohen in the '94 production of "Rent" at the New York theater workshop and carried the role to Broadway, and now to London-took his first acting class when he was "around eight or nine years old, in a suburb of Chicago. It was a children's theater class, where we played theater games, improv and stuff."

His next education came "at Interlochen, which was once a national musical theater camp, and now is a fine arts camp." I took a technique class for a summer"-which included his first taste of Stanislavsky.

"I did that right after I had done [Broadway's] 'Precious Sons,' with Ed Harris and Judith Ivey. I was 14," Rapp recalls, "and I felt I was really starting to learn what it meant to be an actor. Before, I was sort of going on instinct and natural ability. But with 'Precious Sons,' I started to discover that there was a whole lot more to it. My whole world opened up, and my understanding of acting deepened. Then, going to Interlochen, I felt like this would continue to open the door, so I went no specific expectations and to just keep exploring. That whole year was about realizing there were places in my self I could really start to go deeper into and draw on rather than just getting up on stage."

The learning process that year involved even more than activating his craft on stage and at camp. He began to value the role of actor as audience member. "At the same time I was performing in 'Precious Sons,' I saw 'House of Blue Leaves,' with John Mahoney and Swoosie Kurtz. Seeing those performances in such a wonderful play really blue my mind open to the possibilities of being an actor and doing theater," Rapp says "It became, not just something I loved and was fun doing; it became so much more meaningful."

TEACHER TURN OFF

Rapp, raised in Joliet, near Chicago, notes, "There wasn't anything around where I lived" as far as acting class offerings, but he kept working at his craft. Then he decided to move to Los Angeles.

La-La-Land did not endear the acting school to him. "I audited an acting class and found it so ridiculous," Rapp steams. "I said to myself, 'Any acting class is a sham.' The teacher didn't seem to be helping these actors at all. Hardly any of the actors got up and did any work. The teacher just talked on and on about himself. It was in a little hole in the wall, and just seemed a total ridiculous sham." That was in '89. But what difference a year and an opposite coast can make. Rapp moved back to New York and found an acting teacher who fit him like a glass slipper hugged Cinderella's foot. "I met Sande Shurin's husband Bruce Levy, and he gave me her card," Rapp remembers. "I kept it, but I waited a couple of months. I don't know what it was that inspired me to call, but I said, 'Okay, I'll try again. Maybe part of it was meeting Bruce. I got a good vibe.'"

Rapp decided to audit Shurin's class, and he immediately began to be beamed up. "The second she started talking, I jfelt electricity in my body," Rapp explains. "I knew it was right for me. She was onto something, speaking from a place of passion, creativity, and dedication to students which I hadn't seen before. She talked about the power we as actors have at our disposal to tap into. I had an audition for 'Six Degrees of Separation' and in my audition, I took what she had said in that class and kept it with me; and I got the part. That was affirmation that her teaching worked."

Rapp and Shurin-who runs the Sandde Shurin Acting Studio NY/LA -have collaborated for eight years. How else has she helped him? "One of the first things, for me specifically-and it's part of the trap of having acted since I was a little kid-was that I had become very 'professional'; there were things I knew how to do ' the right way.' She kkept saying, 'I want you to go deeper; I want you to explore.' She knew where to go with me, sort of tailored her eye to what I needed.

"From there, it's just been more and more about exploring; trying to help transform into new characters, and broaden my scope and horizons. And it's all been nurturing and challenging."

Rapp's exercises in exploration and going deeper have led to, he feels, his successful character portrayal in the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Rent." He says he's been able to "pour myself into singing in a way I'd never done before, and maybe even inspired people in kthe way I've been inspired" by his own heroes.

Rapp took singing classes briefly with Shirley Calloway. But once "Rent" began, he admits, "I didn't want to sing anymore than the eight shows a week. Still, working with Tim Wilde, the musical director, I've learned so much more about the technique I already had."

With his valuable experience, what advice does Rapp have for the young actor breaking into acting classes in the New York performance scene?

"Shop around and audit," he counsels. "You should only go with a place you feel really comfortable in, because acting is such a delicate, personal adventure to take. Some classes cultivate an environment of being very harsh, and come from a philosophy of tearing down to build back up. I challenge that notion. It's more important to feel nurtured and supported. Asnd also challenged, which is very important-but not demeaned or degraded."

GINGER PRINCE on Sande Shurin, Backstage, September 16, 1994 by *Jerry Tallmer*

You Don't Have To Be Someone Else... The day Ginger Prince broke down in tears before a whole class was the day she met Ginger Prince, actress and human being, coming the other way- and liked what she saw. You would not guess at any such trauma from the crisp, funny, high-vitality ultra-professional Ginger Prince of shows Off- and on Broadway, from "Steel Magnolias" to "Gypsy" to "After the Dancing in Jericho" to the just-concluded national tour of "La Cage aux Folles."

On the occasion in question, she had, she had, in fact, been acting since she was six years old-first as a child star in Hollywood, then everywhere else. She'd suffered through what she looks back on as "many horrible " acting classes "from college, no, from high school on up." Then one night in 1981, a working actress in her 30s she entered a class given by Sande Shurin at the Shurin Studio here in New York.

"What I saw a very Driven, tough, no-nonsense lady who scared me to death. I thought immediately, this is going to be my worst experience. I was petrified." Like all the others, Ginger was asked to stand among some 20n people and tell a little bit about herself. That's when she burst into tears.

"Because I wasn't sure I knew who I was or who I wanted to be. It was much easier in my insecurity to hide behind or within some character I'd created. But when I was asked about myself, I started crying,"

What she found out "that one particular night, and then through the years," was that she'd been most afraid of-Myself-was her greatest asset.

"The most incredible thing I discovered with Sande was: I Know I'm good enough. You don't have to be somebody else. You don't have to be prettier, taller, anything, says the extraordinarily pretty Prince, a product of Los Angeles and Atlanta, Georgia. "We have it all in ourselves, because we are unique."

In the Shurin technique, when you find out who you are, you bring all of that to the character. Ginger still takes classes at Shurin's every Monday night and teaches classes there herself, too.

The bad experiences? "Everything else." She sees the general run of acting teachers spending their lives screaming at you that you're "too emotional, too weak, too loud, not telling the truth, don't belong in this business-anything to degrade you." Out of that did there ever come a positive? "No, never. Never."

Above all, what she found when at last she landed at Shurin's was "a place where I could grow, to the best me, not be anyone else,"

ANTHONY RAPP, Excerpts from Backstage April 5th, 1996, By *Robert Simonson*

Not every performer can make the difficult transition from child to actor adult. The feat, however, is by no means impossible, as is illustrated by the current New York city season, which featured a mini-convention of former child performers enjoying continued success in a variety of high-profile roles.

Anthony Rapp, who won an Outer Critics Circle Award for his role in "Precious Sons" a decade ago, now graces the smash rock musical "Rent."

Rapp, now 24, credits Sande Shurin, his acting teacher of six years with helping him make the transition from child pro to adult actor. "I wouldn't say I was becoming slick as a kid, but I was hitting my mark and saying my lines as kid actors do. She helped make my acting more honest and spontaneous."

He sees his stint taking over the lead role of Alexander in Larry Kramer's "The Destiny of Me" in 1992 as a pivotal role in his growth as a performer. "Even in 'Six Degrees of Separation,' I was still playing a college student. 'The Destiny of Me' was especially important, since in the first act I play a kid, and in the second act I'm an adult,"

Since then Rapp has played a convicted killer in Nicky Silver's "Raised in Captivity" and his present role as a vagabond East Village video artist in the phenomenon "Rent."

Above all, Rapp recommends a mature relationship with the professionals who shape and promote your career. "get in with good teacher so you're exercising your muscles every day, and develop a good relationship with an agent who treats you as a full person."