



The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the 30's

Harold Clurman , Stella Adler (Introduction)

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The Group Theatre was perhaps the most significant experiment in the history of American theater.

Producing plays that reflected topical issues of the decade and giving a creative chance to actors, directors, and playwrights who were either fed up with or shut out of commercial theater, the "Group" remains a permanent influence on American drama despite its brief ten-year life.

It was here that method acting, native realism, and political language had their tryouts in front of audiences who anticipated--indeed demanded--a departure from the Broadway "show-biz" tradition. In this now classic account, Harold Clurman, founder of the Group Theatre and a dynamic force as producer-director-critic for fifty years, here re-creates history he helped make with Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan, Irwin Shaw, Clifford Odets, Cheryl Crawford, Morris Carnovsky, and William Saroyan.

Stella Adler contributed a new introduction to this edition which remembers Clurman, the thirties, and the heady atmosphere of a tumultuous decade.

The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the 30's Details

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From Reader Review The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the 30's for online ebook

Andrea Izzy says

This is a must-read for any student of theatre. It details the roots of our current acting traditions in america.

The first hundred pages is very challenging. In effort to provide a complete history of the Group, the details become dense and the writing a bit clunky. In fairness, as the references and names become more familiar, the book becomes more digestible. It is fascinating both because of (and in spite of) the "play by play" style that Clurman employs.

I am left imagining Clurman as a man divided. He seems to have a vision of an ideal and yet, also I got the sense of him being removed, an arm's length away. Maybe it is the byproduct that comes with the self-reflection of one's own past or history. Perhaps, it came across that way to me, because of his desire to be objective about how things occurred.

In re-reading Stella Adler's introduction to this edition, I think, it may have been this desire to be objective that spared me, sixty four years after the first publication, unfortunately, of a better sense of Clurman as a person. The introduction she wrote gives a more visceral picture of the man, though it is only a page and a half.

However, one thing is clear to me. I am certain of the Group's impact on the generations that were born into this knowledge. I think the upstart nature of theatre in the 21st century directly reflects, this yearning of the group that prompted its birth in 1928.

i think i shall read another of his books.

Update: watch this video for a good sense of his convictions: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2iGQV...>

Had I seen that prior to reading the book, might have had a better sense.

Allison says

A bit repetitive, but an interesting look at how American theater changed into what it is today.

Castille says

Like most of the other reviews I've seen, I really enjoyed parts of the book and found a large percentage of it extremely dry. Most of it concerns the budgetary concerns, inability to raise funding, and the poverty in which the members of The Group lived.

Joy says

Man o man. This one took me awhile. I did find it inspiring and uplifting at times and hopelessly dry at others. It's, quite literally, a play by play of The Group Theatre from beginning to end. It's interesting that the struggles Clurman was facing are the same ones we face today - the commercialism, a small and narrow audience pool, the lack of good theater - people willing to actually change something and take society into account when choosing and developing work. He fights over and over to save his theater and hold his group together and in the end, kinda gives up.

He includes a quote from D.H. Lawrence: "The essential function of art is moral. But a passionate implicit morality, not didactic. A morality which changes the blood rather than the mind...changes the blood first. The mind follows later, in the wake..."

Lydia says

This book is incredible. It's a great historical account of the Group Theatre, and I found Clurman's "fervency," as it were, invading my brain and fueling my desire to keep reading like a maniac.

Suzanne says

What theater geek couldn't love Clurman's stories of Stella Adler's tantrums, Lee Strasburg's obsession with real emotion, or Clifford Odets' rise and fall? Even better is his account of the Group Theater's struggles as a mission driven producing organization. Non-profit American theater owes its heart to The Group and it was really fun to see how it all began. That said, Clurman does go off on some fairly lengthy theoretical diatribes. But then again, that's what visionaries are supposed to have stored in their guts, and I'll no doubt be borrowing from that language sometime soon.

Zanna Frith says

This is a must read for anyone in the theatre. It made me question what my purpose was in pursuing a career as an actress and what I am contributing to the world and the art by going after my dream. I wish I was as clear about my passion as Harold Clurman.

Elizabeth says

A must read for young theatre artists starting out and wanting to do something different and brave.

Pat Gorman says

For anyone that loves theater history, this is a must read. I absolutely loved it. I would not hesitate to read it again down the line. I recommend it highly.

Gabriel Congdon says

(Eyes rise on GABE pacing his living room. He peers at his laptop mumbling about the state of Goodreads. ENTER BUHMANN, Gabe's roommate.)

Gabe: I'm going to review the shit out of the Group Theater. It's perfect Gabe material.

Buhmann: It's about time. Are you going to talk about painters?

Gabe: I do like bringing up painters don't I. It's a way of getting a return on all that fine art knowledge that so far hasn't done much to edify my character.

Buhmann: Is it true that in order to join the group theater you have to forfeit your name?

Gabe: You betcha. The actors also, during a rehearsal process, could only say words that were also in their lines. Any words not used in the play, couldn't be said.

Buhmann: Classic Gabe making stuff up.

Gabe: Well I like a good fictionalization as much as the next lonely heart. Ok, let's get at it.

(GABE sits down and to type out his soon to be world famous Fervent Years reviews)

Fuck yeah!

What a read. It was delightful and so many levels. First of all, all you theater geeks will freak. Let me just drop a few names for ya: Lee Strasberg, Sandy Misner, Stella Adler, Ella Kazan, Clifford Odets. And you run into that cast pretty quick it's not much.

One of the most infesting aspects is the way which Clurman performs and only-kind-of-subtle scarf dance around the portents of radicalism.

Clurman: Yes, you see, we pay all our actors the same rate even if they perform a smaller part, and we don't feature any one actor, and we list everyone's name alphabetically, but communism? NO, no, of course not. I really don't know anything about such things, I've heard of this Marks fellow. One of the actors read a manifesto by the man, but, I'm more of an aesthete.

Yes one has only to imagine some of how these scenes played out.

At its core, it's a good nightmare book into the high-risk, high-reward profession of starting a theater company. Clurman, at the beginning, wanted the American theater to have its moment of aesthetics. When Chekov's *The Seagull* was first performed under the direction of Stanislavski it's said that at the bow the audience was silent before a thunderous applause. Clurman & Co. wanted to import Stanislavski technique into American soil. Did they have success?

You'll have to read the book!

I'm kidding. They don't. The goddamn theater is not a profitable enterprise and America has never really cared about the arts. I'm sure you, reader, could look through the walls of your own local theater and see that it too is crumbling.

(Scene II. A day later. Same setting)

Buhmann: How was the review received?

Gabe: It was a huge success. In fact, I've received many awards and honors for the review and the book publisher said that with this renewed interest in *The Fervent Years* they want to take it on the road and they want me to be the showrunner. And I told them yes!, damn it! From here on out, I'm running *The Fervent Years* by god, and I'll be the one to dictate the terms by which the *Fervent Years* will be made possible.

Catherine says

Harold Clurman's memoir of the Group Theatre is enlightening and inspiring. It's also a bit dry. As far as showing me what a little fervency and passion can accomplish Clurman gets a gold star. However, their endless self-criticism and refusal to accept any script/production/praise as good seem to me to be a large part of their inability to continue. I believe I understand why the Group Theatre is a fundamentally huge building block of modern American theatre, but I think that we can learn as much from their failures as we can from their successes. If nothing else, we can take from "*The Fervent Years*" the notion that wishing we could have done things differently is worthless; instead we should learn from the past and apply those lessons to the present.

Jay Sosnicki says

... Fantastic book about the evolution, triumph and dissolution of The Group Theater by its architect, the late Harold Clurman. His prose is a bit thick at times, but his razor-sharp observations about the Group's work, his colleagues, and his own mistakes is raw and right on. The Group was a fairly short-lived experiment, but it was also the Big Bang of 20th Century theater, and its effects are still being felt.

Ray says

The Fervent Years deals with the creation of The Group Theatre, one of the founding performing companies in American Theatre. This book, written in 1944, describes the building blocks, the rise and the fall, and eventual demise of this organization of actors, directors, playwrights, producers and others responsible for a major infusion of talent and ideas in this theatrical endeavor. The author, Harold Clurman, along with Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford formed the company in the late 1920's, with productions running from 1931 to 1941. Along the way, some of the early greats of the performance scene are talked about: Stella Adler, Clifford Odets, Elia Kazan, Constantine Stanislavsky, Luther Adler, Franchot Tone, John Garfield, Morris Carnovsky, Bobby Lewis and Sandy Meisner.

This was not an easy read for me. It's told as a memoir, with very little dialogue, and a great deal of

discussion on the state of the theatre during that period. The actors involved were barely making a living, struggling for survival, while management turned down opportunities to present works that might have turned a profit and enabled better times for the company. I had difficulty condoning actions which were taken, or often, not taken.

For someone in the performance fields, actors particularly, I would say this is an important read. Otherwise, it could be tough going.

Julia says

a little self-congratulatory, a little long-winded but digestible. it's a comfort to know that theater is just as impossible now as it was in the 30s.

Sydney says

Important for every actor to read and learn the history. It can get long at times, but has some segments I couldn't put it down!
