

Capitol Hill



Photo/Bradley Enghaus

Gennadi Bogdanov demonstrates a gesture and shows how slight movements can have different meanings to the audience during a four-week Biomechanics workshop held at the Freehold Theater Lab Studio on Capitol Hill. Biomechanics is a style of acting that focuses on movement.

A new way to think about acting

Local actors are exposed to the Meyerhold method of Biomechanics during a rare appearance by Russian teacher Gennadi Bogdanov.

Last Sunday, The New York Times stated that American actors are breaking away from Method acting to explore new styles. Imported from Konstantin Stanislavski's Moscow Arts Theater, Method acting dominated American stage acting for decades, as actors dug into

Bogdanov is reintroducing the theatrical world to Biomechanics, a style developed by Stanislavski's great rival, Vsevolod Meyerhold. Stalin's disapproval drove Meyerhold's teaching underground for many years.

into dance-like movements.

The audience was dominated by local actors and directors curious to see Biomechanics in motion. This method was known to most of them only from black-and-white photographs in theater history books.

Rosemary Jones



'It's harder to hold onto your balance on the stage than on a tightrope.'

— Gennadi Bogdanov

A leading practitioner

As the director of the Moscow School of Theatrical Biomechanics, Bogdanov received his own training from one of Meyerhold's students. He is one of the world's leading Biomechanics teachers.

During a packed studio demonstration on Friday, July 31, Bogdanov ran his American students through a series of "études" that exaggerate simple gestures

Sweating through études

For the uninitiated, Bogdanov's études look strange. Actors bend their bodies in exaggerated gestures as they do such pieces such as "Throwing the Stone." It takes great concentration, a good sense of balance and stamina. By the end of the demonstration most of the students were drenched with sweat.

Despite the physical hardships, the workshop had no problem drawing participants. Freehold signed up actors from as far away as Montreal and New York.

Jerry Diercks, executive director of Freehold, was not surprised by the level of interest. Bogdanov teaches regularly

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their inner lives to fuel the emotions of their characters.

Bored by Method training, actors are seeking ways to rejuvenate their art. One of the most unusual, and historic, ways may be a four-week Biomechanics workshop taught by Gennadi Bogdanov on Capitol Hill through the Freehold Theater Lab Studio.

Capitol Hill

Planning committee revises

By Doug Schwartz
News Editor

In an effort to correct some of the mistakes that have been made in the past, the Capitol Hill Planning Committee is revising its second draft of its neighborhood plan within the next month.

The plan, which builds on the same concerns that were addressed in April, is sponsored by the City of Seattle's Neighborhood Planning Office.

The source for this workshop is the Washington State Growth Management Act of the early 1990s. Seattle has four urban centers in King County and state requirements for each.

The city subdivided the Queen Anne, Northgate and Rainier Hill.

In terms of current neighborhood planning, Capitol Hill is

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Capitol Hill

Schwartz appoints new news editor

Beginning with this issue, Doug Schwartz becomes the Capitol Hill Times' free-lance reporter and is editor of the Kirkland Courier, another newspaper owned by Pacific Publishing Co.

Schwartz became a regular contributor to the Queen Anne News four years ago following two trips to Bosnia as a free-lance

A Seattle native, Schwartz is a graduate of the University of Washington. He and his wife, Wedgwood.

Readers are encouraged to contact Doug Schwartz, at 461-1308, for suggestions.

up with a new... Capitol Hill. We've been working on this since 1994." Lang helped establish the first urban planning committee on the Hill, a precursor to the present group.

When the second draft is finished it will be presented to the neighborhoods for comment. In October a validation workshop will take place, during which time the feasibility of the proposals will be seriously addressed.

Goals and concerns

The plan attempts to define what kind of neighborhood Capitol Hill wants to be, and where city money earmarked for improvements might be spent. The plan also addresses aspects of zoning, open spaces and public safety.

Certain areas, such as the vacated lot on the north end of Broad-

the voters) is willing to contribute.

About \$50 million is expected to be made available to the 37 neighborhoods.

How the money is divided is a critical issue. Residential neighborhoods expecting to experience little or no growth need less money than those that will. Yet if an equal amount of money is given to each one, high-growth neighborhoods

binding document carrying nearly the power of law. Instead it will be a statement by neighborhoods telling the city what they would like to see.

It does worry people that their work could be ignored. But Lang sees this as a mixed blessing.

"If the plan had the power of law the final document would be much less extensive. It would have been a whittled-down, smaller

to the city in... The neighborhood is evolving. "Right now," is carved in

Actors experience a new discipline

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in several schools in Europe, but he lacks a "home base" in the United States. His workshops are quite rare in this country.

Diercks said he hopes Freehold will be able to develop a program that allows Bogdanov to return on a regular basis to teach new workshops in our city.

"We hope to generate this style of work in Seattle," said Diercks. Workshops like Bogdanov's give actors and directors a chance to expand and diversify their skills.

The group watching Friday's demonstration were buzzing about ways Biomechanics could be translated into actual scenes.

Using Biomechanics

A compact man, Bogdanov can move rapidly through the études or stand absolutely still on one foot. His interest in Biomechanics came after his standard training, including studying Stanislavski.

Speaking through an interpreter, Bogdanov stated that he does not see Stanislavski and Meyerhold's methods as mutually exclusive. "They fill each other out and make each other whole," he said.

Biomechanics is based on the

physical working of an actor. Before Meyerhold, said Bogdanov, traditional training ignored "how the actor comes out on stage, how he's looking, how he's using his voice — all that was neglected."

Meyerhold, who began teaching in St. Petersburg and moved in Moscow in the 1920s, was interested in breaking traditions and reshaping the ways theater was performed.

"Always there comes that person who says we can't live as we lived before," Bogdanov said of Meyerhold.

Meyerhold's method was considered so controversial after the Russian Revolution that he was denounced by Stalin. Bogdanov's 1980s Biomechanic production of "Waiting for Godot," could not be performed publicly until 1986, when the Soviets system finally loosened its hold on the arts.

Taking actors apart

Bogdanov ran the students through a series of warm-up exercises on Friday that looked like a mix of juggling and Marine boot camp.

"Smile," he said in English to one student doing a one-arm push-up and balancing act.

The purpose of these exercises,

he stated, was to help the actor to start "taking himself apart."

"An actor talks with gestures," he said. Bogdanov wanted his students to start thinking about those gestures, about where they begin and how they should end.

"It's harder to hold onto your balance on the stage than on a tight rope," said Bogdanov, taking a few wobbling steps to demonstrate. "Much harder because there are so many more ways to go."

Now that his students have learned the basics, they will work for two weeks on applying the

principles of Biomechanics to works ranging from Shakespeare to Tennessee Williams.

For those interested in seeing Biomechanics in action, Freehold will have another public demonstration on Aug. 14, at 8 p.m., at the East Performance Hall, 1525 10th Ave. E. Admission is free, though donations are welcome. For more information, call 323-7499.

Rosemary Jones writes about arts and entertainment for the Capitol Hill Times. She can be reached at 283-7621.

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Incident reports from the Seattle Police Department's East Precinct. Police beat. Page 8

Right: Freehold Theater Lab Studio presents Off the Cuff, four performances of dance. Page 8

