

1. Inner Truth

Michael Sheen Gets Into Character <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001z6j3>



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Michael Sheen explores the art of acting. One night in March 1906 an actor gave a not-very-good performance. Nothing particularly unusual about that – it happens, according to your taste, all the time. But this actor was Constantin Stanislavski. He had already played a decisive role in forging a new kind of theatre company, the Moscow Art Theatre – a tightly disciplined, dedicated ensemble with high production values. The MAT also established its own approach to acting – away from the declamatory, melodramatic style of the day and towards something more emotional, more naturalistic, something possessing, as Stanislavski might have put it, inner truth. But on that night in March 1906 his own inner truth, he felt, was lacking. The crisis this triggered in Stanislavski – the Stockmann crisis, as it's sometimes called (Stanislavski was performing the role of Dr Thomas Stockmann in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*) – prompted him to retreat and revise his firmly-held ideas on acting – as he did throughout his life – and to begin formulating what became known as the System: a codified way for actors to create believable, authentic, naturalistic characters night after night. Stanislavski's ideas have been passed like a baton down the generations since, with subsequent acting teachers adapting and modifying his ideas in different ways. They're still part of the bedrock of acting training today. Michael Sheen explores Stanislavski's ideas, with writer Isaac Butler; actor and teacher Tom McClane; actors Adrian Lester and Simon McBurney; and legendary acting teacher Patsy Rodenburg. Isaac Butler's history of Stanislavski and the

Method is called 'The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act'. Producer: Martin Williams

2. From System to Method

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001zg5b> 21/08/26



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Michael Sheen explores the strange art of acting. When the Moscow Art Theatre performed at Jolson's 59th Street Theatre in New York in January and February of 1923 they were a huge success. It is said that they received a thirty-minute standing ovation on the first night. How did they manage to create such powerful performances? One of the answers to that question was found in the approach to acting of the company's director Constantin Stanislavski. Over the previous three decades he had codified, adjusted and refined his own approach to actor training, which he called the System. Stanislavski never spoke English and his System was taught by a sequence of associates. And, as happens, things get lost in translation. The Moscow Art Theatre were an inspiration to the Group Theatre in New York, which aimed to emulate its artistic principles – and its approach to acting. Under its director, Lee Strasberg, the Group Theatre took Stanislavski's System – particularly the elements relating to the use of an actor's own emotion and psychology – and transformed it into what became known as the Method. However, when another leading member of The Group, Stella Adler, went to study personally with Stanislavski, she discovered that he had moved on from that emphasis on

psychology and emotion and considered it damaging – he now emphasised a deep immersion in the context of the script and the importance of finding character through the process of action within that context. Stella Adler's news about the truth of Stanislavski's teaching was not well received by Lee Strasberg and it precipitated a split within the Group Theatre, within the personal relationship between Adler and Strasberg – and, it might be said, within our own understanding of what exactly Stanislavski's System and Strasberg's Method actually are. Michael Sheen explores the transformation of Stanislavski's 'system' into The Method, with the writer Isaac Butler, the actor Anne-Marie Duff and journalist Michael Goldfarb, an ex-student of Stella Adler. Isaac Butler's history of Stanislavski and the Method is called 'The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act'. Producer: Martin Williams