

## Boundless Improv

*Boundless Improv: Joining the Viewpoints to Language, Song and Image*, produced by Synaesthetic Theatre, marked the first educational collaboration between Master Teachers Wendell Beavers and Stephen Wangh. Both part of the core faculty at NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing, the two teachers had "used and abused each other's work for 20 years." *Boundless Improv* was first offered over two weekends (May 31-June 8) in 2003, and served 20 participating artists of varied ages, disciplines and backgrounds.



Bringing together their self-described opposite aesthetics afforded Beavers and Wangh the opportunity to collaborate directly with one another. For their former students, it was a rare occasion to experience two masters challenging each other and re-inventing their approaches to teaching. For newcomers, the workshop blew open the doors of perception, and granted permission to explore new external and internal terrain.

The physical acting, primarily led by Wangh, used various full-bodied acting exercises to bring actors closer to their impulses and away from making intellectually "clever" choices. The jazz singing portion, spearheaded by Synaesthetic's own Aubrey Hardwick, worked to liberate

the voice from value judgments and inhibitions, allowing novice and accomplished singers alike to experiment vocally. The Viewpoints, led by Beavers, provided vocabulary and an encompassing improv structure, with a strong emphasis on composition.

Soon after the workshop, the Synaesthetic Viewpoint interviewed instructors Wendell Beavers and Stephen Wangh regarding their experience with the three-way collaboration.

### *What is Boundless Improv?*

**STEPHEN WANGH:** *Boundless Improv* is not a technique or a style. It is instead a 'permission.' A permission to allow

improvisation of all disciplines to be mixed and integrated with each other. It is an attempt to find the basic "rules" of performance improvisation which underlie any kind of improvisation. And it is a search for a way to train the performer to undertake this multiple form.

**WENDELL BEAVERS:** An invitation to treat dancing, acting, and song/voiced language as aesthetically equal and as one single improvisational field. On the performer's inner level it would be an invitation to work without self imposed censorship with all impulses, feedback, etc. [considered] inherently desirable and equal until

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Reflections on Icon



**Joy Leonard (Co-director):** *Icon* was a difficult show to birth, but we loved our weird offspring all the more for that. The ensemble that made *Icon* happen - actors, designers and crew -- was sharp, dedicated, unfazable and absolutely fantastic. Across the board people were experimenting with new roles, media and ways of working. Actors outdid themselves in range and precision. John and his crew were so good at capturing and editing the images that

Conceived in a group and born of a nine-month rehearsal process, Synaesthetic Theatre's *Icon* emerged as a strange but hypnotically beautiful creature. The story was drawn from the myth of Narcissus and Echo, told via scenes and images from iconic films and musical numbers. The production used front and rear projection, 12 video feeds edited live and presented in split screen format, and a richly layered soundscape built from film samples and original themes. *Icon* performances were held in February and March of 2003 at Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Arts Center on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

many in the audience were shocked to learn it was all done live - even though they could see the camera crew right in front of them!

**Chris Nichols (Co-director):** For me one of the most exciting aspects of *Icon* was that the entire creative team was present and working at all the performances. Designers were operating their own medium live every night, cues and concepts continued

to evolve as the actors found greater detail and nuance with each show. It created an incredible bond between the ensemble members and an amazing cohesion of mediums.

**John DesRoches (Video Design):** The process of making *Icon*, from a video design perspective, was incredibly freeing creatively. We integrated the video design

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# Upcoming Projects

As we enter the Fall of 2003, Synaesthetic is percolating all kinds of new ideas and methods. Company members are busily inventing, researching, training and planning for more advanced workshops and original productions.

## Spring 2004 Production



Synaesthetic's producers and directors have entered the early conception stage for our next show. Living in the shadow of 9/11 and the ongoing (official or unofficial) War on Terror, the political has become deeply personal. As individuals, we find ourselves asking - how can I pursue my own life, liberty and happiness with a clear conscience?

We look about and find ourselves in a vast Wasteland, which exists between Utopia (Nowhere) and Dystopia, between the brutal force of the Jihad and the imperialism of the Empire. It is the ideal space for the retelling and recreation of our mutual histories. This is where our next piece is rooted, in a search for individual power and accountability. So far, we see a Warrior traveling one of the many paths in this barren 21st century landscape, one who seeks truth, balance and a way of action in the midst of chaos and destruction. We want to explore the genesis of the Warrior Spirit - the moment from which action and conviction arise - in an environment as morally ambiguous as the one we find ourselves in today.

Synaesthetic plans to produce this next piece in May of 2004. For more information about the production as it develops, please visit <http://www.synaesthetic-theatre.com/wasteland>.

*"Like fire covered by smoke,  
like a mirror covered by dust  
... just so is the wisdom in  
humankind covered over by  
the insatiable fire of desire,  
the constant enemy of the  
wise."*

Bhagavad-Gita III.38-39

## New concepts & workshops

In the spirit of ongoing experimentation, Synaesthetic's producers have devised a new structure for concept development, enabling more company members to actively engage in this exciting early state of the creative process. Working in small groups, we will take these 3 fledgling concepts through the paces - researching, brainstorming and outlining various layers of literary, visual and philosophical sources. This alchemy of materials provides the foundation of the Syn-aesthetic, an architecture of tension between multiple perspectives. Typhoid Mary, the ancient House of Atreus and the Blood Countess (a.k.a. Elizabeth Bathory) are all central figures around which new show concepts are coalescing.

Following the concept development period, Synaesthetic will spend October and November work-shopping techniques for creating material through collaborative processes. This will include refining our current methods, as well as testing new structures. This period of experimentation will not only feed our next rehearsal process, but also allows us to further codify our creative methods for training purposes. We intend to offer a new training workshop for directors and performers in June '04 (dates TBA) that will focus on collaborative generation.



## Viewpoints Workshop: 10/18/03

The four-hour workshop serves as an introduction to the Viewpoints for new-comers, while also providing a back-to-basics review for performers with some Viewpoints experience. By mixing veteran viewpointers and newcomers, and taking ample time with the introduction of each element, Synaesthetic creates a challenging and engaging environment for exploration and personal discovery.

**WHERE:** Broome Corner Studio  
(425 Broome Street, #4R)

**WHEN:** Saturday, October 18, 2:30 pm - 6:30 pm

**COST:** \$20

**RESERVE:** call 212.696.6721 or  
email [viewpoints@synaesthetic-theatre.com](mailto:viewpoints@synaesthetic-theatre.com)

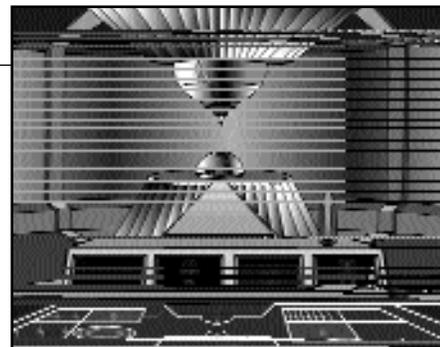


## Opening the Box further

The creators of openthebox.net have devoted much of the summer to developing more material. Additional dialogue has been written and recorded, new worlds have been added to both Prometheus and Frankenstein, and ideas that were only hinted at in the stage show *Tamatebako {the box}* have been expanded. The site has near-

ly doubled in size with the additions. If you haven't visited the box recently log on to enjoy the newest material in Synaesthetic's ever-evolving cyber creation tale.

**GO TO: [www.openthebox.net](http://www.openthebox.net)  
hackcode: RYOMA**



## Building a Strong Foundation

Since January, Synaesthetic Theatre has been working hard to strengthen the organizational health of the company, under the guidance of Board Chair Jessica Baker. Here are a few brief words on recent administrative achievements, and suggestions for tax-deductible donations!

Through the assistance of Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Synaesthetic Theatre established a business relationship with Paul, Hastings, Janofsky, and Walker, LLP, a world-wide law firm. This generous firm has graciously provided us with pro-bono legal services, and thanks to their assistance Synaesthetic Theatre is now officially incorporated in the state of New York. We plan to continue working with Paul, Hastings, Janofsky, and Walker, LLP in filing for federal not-for-profit designation. We would very much like to thank this wonderful firm for the support they have provided us in this crucial step in our organizational development.

Creating and defining the roles of the Board of Directors is another achievement of 2003, and we are proud to announce that

our first official Board of Directors includes Jessica Baker, Chris Nichols, Joy Leonard, and David Crittenden. Next year the Board will be coordinating federal not-for-profit applications, as well actively recruiting executive assistance from our community of Synaesthetic supporters. We are continually looking to grow our base of experienced, business-minded individuals who believe in our mission and would like to offer their assistance in helping us achieve our goals.

Overall, it has been an exciting season of change and improvement inside Synaesthetic Theatre. With your continued support, we look forward to taking more strides forward as we strive towards an increasingly stable & successful company!

### Want to help?

If you or someone you know would be interested in helping Synaesthetic Theatre reach the next level and would like to volunteer to assist our Board of Directors, please contact:

**[jessica@synaesthetic-theatre.com](mailto:jessica@synaesthetic-theatre.com)**

Synaesthetic Theatre is always in need of theatrical/multimedia hard goods and in-kind donations. Do you have a storage room filled with old TVs or digital projectors that you just can't find a spot for? Send them to us! Did that dream of having your own band fizzle out, and now you're stuck with a sound board with nothing to input?? We'll take it!! Are you staring at a large empty space and thinking, "Hmmm, now what could I use this for?" Give us a call! We need space!! If you have any question regarding whether Synaesthetic Theatre could use what YOU have to offer, give us a call. All donations are 100% tax-deductible. ☺

## Greetings and Farewells

Synaesthetic says a resounding "Welcome back!" to Jessica Baker, who previously assisted the company on an "as needed" freelance basis, both on and offstage. She performed in *ROT* as the voice of The Judge, performed on cello in *Ophelia's Madness*, and worked as part of the onstage crew in *Icon*. Behind the scenes, over the past five years Jessica frequently worked with the company as an on-call consultant for financial matters, long range planning, and general management based advising. Recently, she expressed her willingness to expand her

responsibilities with the company, and we excitedly invited her to serve as a more permanent part of the Synaesthetic producing team. Her past experience as the Managing Director of the LOFT Theater and her current work as the Facilities Manager for Blue Man Productions has provided her with a great amount of knowledge which, happily for us, she is willing to share. We are thrilled to induct such a level-headed, forward-thinking and multi-talented woman into our ranks!

At the same time, Synaesthetic sadly says good-bye to longtime company mem-

ber, Maximilian Frey. Most recently seen in *Icon* (where his roles included a dead-on Bogey and a pelvis-shaking Elvis) and as the title role in *Shadow of the Invisible Man*, Max brought a strong sense of dedication, determination and strength to the company. We will miss not only his creative voice, but also his commitment to the administrative and producing side of the company, where he directed our Marketing efforts for 3 years. Please join us in wishing him continued success in all his pursuits! ☺

## **Boundless** *continued from page 1*

placed in the context of a particular improvisational moment. What is interesting about working with the concept of 'boundless' is that it inevitably leads us into endless exploration of boundaries. There is no 'boundless' without boundary and there is no 'open improvisation' without some kind of profound relationship to structure. Training involves both ends of this, cultivating the freedom to allow things to happen and developing acute abilities of recognition or discriminating awareness...

### **Why did the two of you want to work together? And why this kind of work?**

**WB:** Paraphrasing Steve, 'We have used and abused each other's work for about 20 years', so it just seemed appropriate to work together directly. Also, I think we are about as opposite as two human beings can be except at our core, that is I think we

agree completely about what a human being is or might be.

**SW:** For years I've found Wendell's teaching of the Viewpoint work wonderfully clear and concise. And, though I've picked up some of his ideas, I have not learned how to see and to communicate as clearly as he what the performer must do in order to take possession of Viewpoint work. Also, Wendell makes a positive, loving workspace, and I want to share that.

### **Why did you approach Synaesthetic to present the workshop?**

**SW:** It seems to me that the Synaesthetic work I've seen comes closest of any working theater of trying to embody the combination of acting and movement work which underlies the *Boundless Improv*. Also: I like and trust you guys. You have your hearts in the right place and your

heads screwed on well.

**WB:** I am really interested in groups who have used the Viewpoints as some kind of theoretical lynch pin. I want to both support you in that and also pull the rug out....

### **What was your overall experience with the workshop?**

**WB :** Too complex to relate in a few sentences. I thought we did ok as a beginning collaboration. I struggle with the level we can achieve when burdened with having to improvise all material as well as its moment to moment form of presentation. I think I am just a frustrated director right now.

**SW :** As pleasant a teaching experience as I can remember. 

## **Reflections** *continued from page 1*

ideas into the piece-making process at a very early stage so that video concepts developed along with the overall show concepts. This was helpful in keeping the video a flexible medium rather than constraining the show's development

**Alexandra Gray (Camera Crew):** Looking through a camera lens was a whole new way to experience a live show. As a performer, I am usually concerned with my own actions, the stage picture of a scene, etc, but as a camera op I was concerned with the broader through-line of the show. I envisioned how each scene being shot fit into the larger telling of the story. I was very conscious of the audience's experience--how what they saw influenced how

they felt. I knew I could choose what to show them, highlighting moments they might have missed, by aiming the camera in a certain direction, zooming in, or slowing the shutter speed.

**Clinton Powell (Narcissus):** Reflections dance around Marilyn Monroe, Jimmy Stewart, Mother, and Elvis Presley. Classic movies, video cameras, and those wonderful people out there in the dark. A love that couldn't be, and the girl that watched it happen. But mostly I remember the pond. There's no place like home. Hours of staring into the water ... the eye of this celluloid maelstrom...

**Margaret O'Sullivan (Icon Actor):** In an effort to learn iconic film scenes, I had to watch them over and over and over. This gave me a whole new appreciation for the original work. I was so impressed and challenged by Gloria Swanson as Norma Desmond and Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates.

**Tina West Chavous (Echo):** We lost 3 cast members. We lost our performance space. We postponed the show and elongated the rehearsal process by 3.5 months. Our video projector and camera were stolen. A lot of bad stuff happened and I had the best time because I was doing an awesome show with the hardest working multimedia company in show business. 

Synaesthetic Theatre 

851 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213

[www.synaesthetic-theatre.com](http://www.synaesthetic-theatre.com)

**syn-aes-thet-ic**, *adj.* characterizes a work of art which produces harmony out of different or opposing impulses.