

The Last Word

By Harold Gould, B.A. '47

As I look back on my State College experience, I think I can identify three things that have influenced my work as an actor.

Certainly, my work with Agnes Futterer in her drama classes was crucial. She converted me from a smug little know-it-all high-school performer given to self-indulgent exhibitionism into someone more disciplined. She alerted me to the power of language, and the need to vocalize it with clarity and variety. And, as I came to realize, her emphasis on attention to language as a means of determining character and intent in a play vivified my classes in poetry and the novel in English literature.

But I must say, though I have tried to incorporate such training in my professional work, and it continues to enrich my reading, it has also had a depressing effect. It has made me a restless and cranky witness of most movies, many television programs and even live theatre performances in their careless treatment of language. Necessary exposition, important plot revelations and crucial dramatic moments are often performed with unintelligible, slurred speech, or obscured by sound and visual effects. (Oh dear, have the standards I acquired At State College actually poisoned my enjoyment of these performing arts?)

A happier effect of my State College experience was the opportunity to develop my comic instincts. Every Friday, the entire student body would assemble in Page Auditorium to learn of school events for the upcoming week. I often took

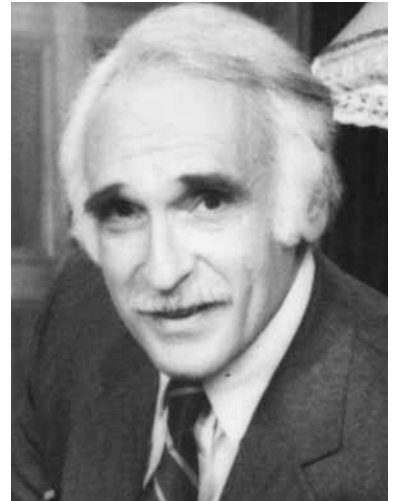
turns delivering such information in brief skits or musical jingles, and my frequent success in these efforts previewed that portion of my career spent in sketch work with Carol Burnett, Red Skelton, Danny Kaye, Jack Benny, Red Buttons, Carl Reiner, Woody Allen, Mel Brooks and others.

In common with my contemporaries at State College, I spent a good portion of the curriculum in education courses prescribed to further the school's main goal of teacher preparation. At the time, I thought these classes fairly arid and unproductive, and I resigned myself to enduring them.

But as I now look back on them, I think they may possibly have enriched my work as an actor. Especially when I was performing works of Shakespeare, Shaw, Ibsen, Molière, Stoppard, Arthur Miller, Pirandello, Vaclav Havel, etc., my approach as an actor was to share my understanding of my character and the text with the class, the audience – not to perform at them but to maintain their attention, excite their interest and invite them into the play as I saw it. Some of the best classroom learning I experienced from elementary to graduate school came from teachers whose immersion in their subject matter and whose enthusiasm for it sparked a similar response in me.

If the enjoyment, skill and love of my work engendered at State College helped to produce for my audiences laughter, along with a heightened awareness of the human condition, I would deem myself fulfilled in my chosen profession.

To read more about Harold Gould's life and career, please turn to page 21.



Agnes Futterer

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