



CHECK OUT THE BEST THEATER BOOK OF THE MONTH FOR FEBRUARY 2022

MICHAEL GILTZ | FEBRUARY 1, 2022

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Every month, Broadway Direct spotlights the best theater books of the month, just for you.

The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act

By Isaac Butler
\$30, Bloomsbury Publishing

You can see a great play in January and just *know* it will be one of the best shows of the year. It’s only four weeks into 2022 and it’s clear *The Method* is going to be one of the most talked-about, argued-about, and popular theater *books* of the year. Author Isaac Butler explores the history of Method acting, how it began as the System, how creator Konstantin Stanislavski (and others!) talked about, argued about, and fretted over acting and how to act and how to teach acting — and changed theater in the process. The details of its origins in Russia are engrossing, but Butler doesn’t stop there. He follows the System to America, where it becomes the Method and revolutionizes theater acting yet again, and then invades Hollywood and comes back to theater — and destroys friendships and lives and lifts others up and links itself to people who never even studied the Method, much less embraced it. *The Method* is fun, informative, and as fair as one can be in describing a Death Match between the likes of Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler and too many others to name. Butler captures the thrill of the Moscow Art Theatre turning Anton Chekhov’s flop *The Seagull* into a triumph as they present real-life on stage like never before. Major achievements, like the Group Theater’s production of *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets, and Marlon Brando on Broadway in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, are almost as much fun to read about as disastrous European tours and petty infighting. Indeed, *The Method* covers a lot of fighting — when you’re trying to pin down something as nebulous as acting and how to do it, the tiniest differences in approach magnify again and again into unforgivable betrayals. You can debate Butler’s insights just as passionately. I’m not down for his dismissal of James Dean, but I agree wholeheartedly that John Garfield’s galvanic performance in the hit movie *Four Daughters* is a landmark in film acting. (But no, *Daughters Courageous* from 1939 is not better, Isaac!) You get the idea. *The Method* is rollicking, contentious, opinionated, and balanced in its treatment of the major players. Reading about stage actors of the 1800s to Meryl Streep and Dustin Hoffman battling it out on the set of *Kramer vs. Kramer* to James Lipton becoming an unlikely TV star in the 1990s is as fascinating as I imagine it was to audit the grand Adler or watch Ellen Burstyn work with Strasberg back in the day. Not to be missed.

Michael Giltz is the co-host of the weekly entertainment podcast Showbiz Sandbox. He has covered all areas of entertainment as a journalist, critic, feature writer, and analyst, contributing to numerous outlets, including the New York Daily News, New York Post, New York Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, Huffington Post, Entertainment Weekly, and The Advocate. When Michael’s not attending the theater, he’s reading about it.

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