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Behind the scenes with Scott Klavan

By Michael Perlman
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Scott Klavan & his students, Central Queens Y Drama Workshop



Scott Klavan headshot

Every Thursday for the past three years, a mix of amateurs and more advanced actors have been rehearsing monologues and dialogues in the Central Queens Y's Drama Workshop, which is led by actor, teacher and writer Scott Klavan.

A lifetime member of The Actors Studio, Klavan teaches "method acting," a technique that helps his students portray a character truthfully by drawing from their own personal experiences.

“The character is the glove and you’re the hand inside it,” said Klavan. “Bringing yourself to the role can be taught to anyone. It’s always you, as if you were the young King of England or a salesman in Queens about to be fired.”

Klavan was raised in Great Neck and lived in Manhattan and Los Angeles before relocating to Riverdale. He has taught acting throughout the city, including to seniors at the 92nd Street Y and drama therapy to teens with emotional and mental challenges at alternative schools and hospitals.

Klavan has appeared in productions of “The Teahouse of the August Moon” and “Double Sophia,” and on television in shows such as “Picket Fences” and “As The World Turns.”

He has also done voiceover work on “The American Experience” and “Wide Angle” on PBS, while “Cadaverous” and “Color of Truth” mark some of his most well-known film roles.

He said sometimes landing a good role is just about being the right person at the right time.

“Usually in acting the more risk you take the higher the reward, but on a business and professional side, it’s usually about ‘type,’” he said. “The business is not fair, as no business is fair. Are you the type they need at that moment in history?”

One of Klavan’s most memorable accomplishments came after 20 years as an actor when he performed alongside Tovah Feldshuh in “Irena’s Vow” on Broadway.

He credits his success to ongoing participation in workshops, readings and large and small projects, as well as roles in hundreds of plays dating as far back as his junior high days.

“When I attended Kenyon College, I performed in the premiere of ‘C.C. Pyle and the Bunion Derby,’ directed by Kenyon alum Paul Newman, who was my acting hero growing up,” said Klavan.

After school, he worked as Newman and Joanne Woodward’s script analyst, where he read and critiqued thousands of submitted scripts.

“I remember going out with Paul, Joanne and a group to a restaurant, and when a bowl of peanuts was passed around, he had one peanut,” said Klavan, which exhibited Newman’s incredibly disciplined demeanor. “I was willing to reject scripts by famous writers if they weren’t good for Paul.”

His parents attempted to give him and his brothers a typical suburban environment, but Klavan was raised in a show business family. Unsurprisingly a major influence is his father, WNEW radio personality Gene Klavan, who he described as a natural with a particular integrity of performance.

“My father did dozens of voices, accents, characters, and improvised his show every day on the radio for over 30 years,” he said, “first with his partner Dee Finch and then as a solo act.”

His father also taught him to be suspicious of authority.

“My father was rebellious in his own way and would make fun of his bosses and sponsors on the air, something that is now common but then was new and took guts,” Klavan said.

Klavan is currently writing a book, developing a one-man show, and directing a new play by a Broadway producer.

“I am determined to work on as many positive projects as I can before I fall down and don’t get up,” he said. “As a believer in the concepts of commitment and stimulation, I try to get this across in my classes. I believe in walking the walk.”